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ABSTRACT

This short book, based on the Swedish experience, explores the concept and the operation of study circles. The book is organized in nine sections. The first section looks at the various definitions of study circles in history and the literature, arriving at a broad working concept of study circles. This is followed by an overview of the international connections of study circles. The next two sections set out, respectively, eight principles of study circles and four approaches that study circles can take. The next section examines the work process in study circles. It is followed by information on recruiting study circle members, conducting meetings, and planning. The final section outlines the role of the study circle leader. An appendix provides a study circle report form. (KC)

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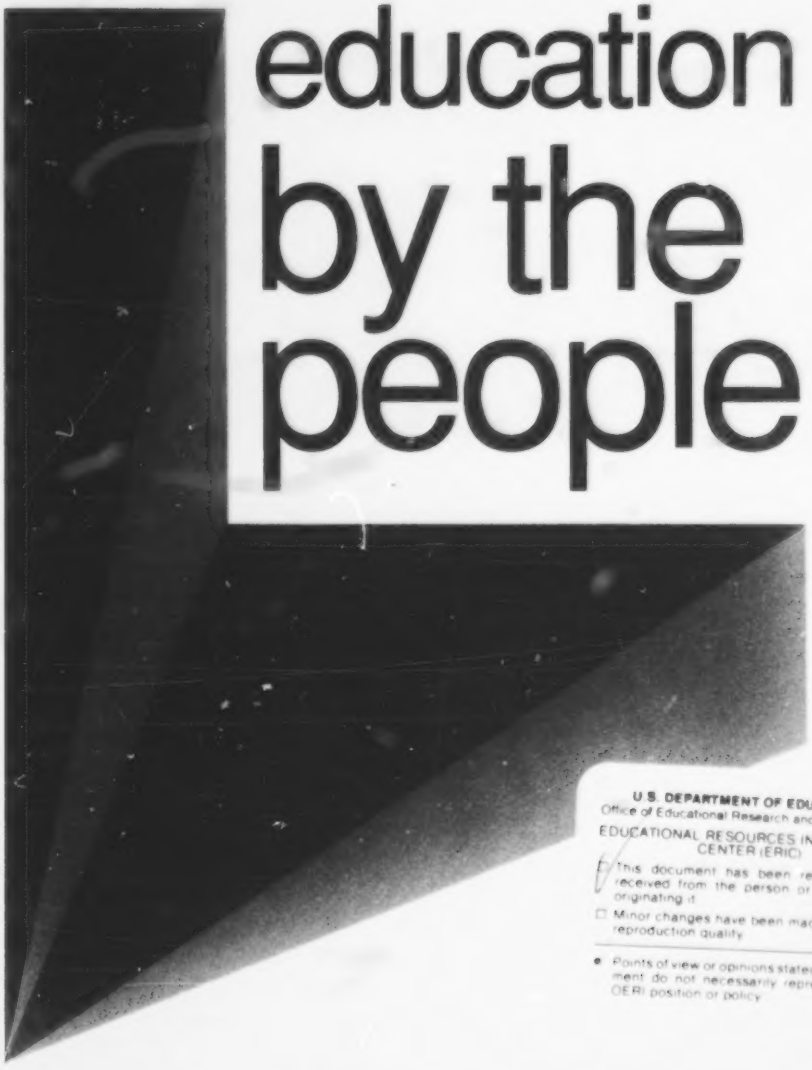

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— study circles

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education

by the people

— study circles

Henry Blid

This reprint of "Education by the people – study circles" is produced for Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (ABF/Workers' Educational Association) in Sweden. It has been slightly revised by adding one more principle to the seven presented in the earlier prints. This addition made, in its turn, some other minor text abbreviations necessary. The language has been checked in order to make the presentation more clear. The reprint is produced pending the finishing of a handbook on study circles with the tentative title "Take charge of your world" which the author is writing together with Marguerite Culp, an American journalist and editor. A comment: Wherever the concept "adult education" is used in the text, it should be understood to match the Swedish word "folkbildning". Unfortunately, it is impossible to translate this word into English as there is no English equivalent, but it corresponds roughly to growth and development free from any school system.

Brunnsvik, Ludvika, August, 1989
The author

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Preface

Had it not been for the facts; that my daughter Nina, during her Christmas holidays from her studies at Iowa State University, had complained that she had trouble in getting a study circle off the ground; that I had been granted a scholarship from the Swedish Institute to study trade-union administration and training in the USA; and that there seems to be a revival of study circle activities in the States; this attempt, to describe what study circles may look like, would still have remained a passing fancy, surfacing now and then, just to be put away and suppressed.

I have been involved in study circle work on and off during most of my adult life, as a participant only, as a study circle leader and as a professional educator – I was, for example, responsible for the application of this method to the gargantuan study circle campaign, "Man is Health/Mtu ni Afya" which gathered more than 1.5 million participants in Tanzania 1973.

I have tried, in vain, to acquire a small book in English about study circles, during my work in Tanzania and Zambia in the seventies. It was not to be found. My search continued afterwards without success, but I frequently met the need for such a book – not only for use by study circle leaders, but also for organizers of adult education activities. This was the idea behind the production of this little book.

You are now holding a proof copy in your hands – and you are advised to use it as such. I regret that it may be, as it is now, a hurried piece of work, written mainly in evenings and during weekends. I have, however, endeavoured to prepare it for use as a basis for discussion and for an exchange of experiences and views. I will, indeed, be very grateful for any comment and observation.

Finally, this work has not been accomplished in a vacuum. I have been very fortunate to be able to discuss parts of the content with Inge Johansson, former President and Director of Studies of

Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (Workers' Educational Association of Sweden), Jan Byström, at that time of Kooperativa Institutet in Stockholm, colleagues and friends at the College of the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions at Brunnsvik and at Brunnsvik's Folk High School, and last but not least, with my wife Irina.

Ludvika, April 4, 1983
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The jumping-off board

There is, to my knowledge, no broad description of the study circle method. There are many views on what should constitute a study circle and still more has been said about how work should be carried out in the circle. When I now endeavour to write a brief description, I am doing this fully aware that some parties will object to my presentation. But it is, in my opinion, flagrantly clear that too much has been brought under the heading "study circle" making the concept look more like a constantly changing amoeba than an educational method. Of course, we all need, want and must have freedom – learning and education alike – but we never ask for chaos. And *who* will live in chaos? But when study circles can include class teaching, vocational training, idle conversation around topics chosen at random as well as serious study, cooperatively planned and performed, *then* it is time for us to stop, look around and assess the situation. We must ask ourselves: What is going on? Jan Byström pictures this very well in his investigation about study circles. (Alla "studiecirklar" blir inte studiecirklar. Raben & Sjögren, Stockholm 1978. Title of Swedish original in English, All "study circles" do not become study circles.)

Looking back, we will find the answers. I will try to indicate some of them. One is the willingness to accept that the study circle leader acts as a teacher – innumerous language circles bear witness to that end. Another is where study circles have been gradually permitted to create things instead of learning – as has been the case in many a handicraft circle. I also believe that the widely-used standardized course material in many cases may have unintentionally (?) made the study circle members passive when instead it should have activated them.

Looking back, we will also find what should be the remedies for the present situation. We can start by asking ourselves: why did the labour movement in Sweden once adopt the study circle for the education of its members? What was the vision of the pioneers?

The pioneers did, in fact, see the masses of workers organized in their own organizations as the vehicle for development. To quote Oscar Olsson, often called the father of the study circle, from his famous motion to the 1902 congress of the Swedish branch of the International Order of Good Templars (reproduced in Thure Nerman, "Studiecirkeln". Stockholm 1952. Title of Swedish original in English: "The study circle"):

"Certainly, great education work can be carried out with the set-up as proposed here. That the work has its foundations in the working-class itself further guarantees its success; it is hardly worth while to deny any longer, that if anything substantial shall be done **for** *this class, this must also be done* **by** *it; certainly, it will itself have to get down to work on the task; this will by no means be done by any other class." (P. 56)*

He further developed his views in a pamphlet a few years later – "Folkets bildningsarbete" (Stockholm 1911), title of Swedish original in English "The educational work of the people" – characteristically the motto is *"For* the people and *by* the people":

"The real task of adult education must be to move the masses to conscious and concerned self-education work. This will, of course, succeed more speedily and safely the more the adult education organizations are supported by the masses themselves, their work and their involvement. (P. 5)

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"The understanding of the connection of one's own life's work, however small, however inconsiderable, with the great roaring life in the mighty passing of time, arouses an enthusiasm, which can bring about as great miracles as those of the fanatic, and which, in a completely different way, guarantees a very fruitful result. (P. 16)

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"The more clearly the members of an organization understand the aims of the organization and the means of reaching them, the stronger the organization will become." (P. 18)

These visions of Oscar Olsson were shared, supported and developed by another man, the statistician, economist, educator, composer, politician, MP, Prime Minister and founder of the Swedish Workers' Educational Association (ABF, 1912), Rickard Sandler. The worker himself is the self-evident starting point for Sandler's educational philosophy as presented in his speech at the World Conference on Adult Education, 1929. It is for the workers "to make their own educational movement according to their own ideas". He has a strong belief in the workers' capability and their right to choose their own education. Obviously, he is very much aware that workers may require assistance, but that does not change his basic beliefs:

"There must be found a movement amongst the workers themselves for workers' education to become worthy of its name." (Conference report, p. 379)

Such an education "is produced by the workers' own demands for information and consequently coloured by their interests". He maintains that:

"the objects of workers' education is to turn the workers into active citizens in the living cultural society. They must therefore be concerned in cultural inheritance, and by the acquisition of this culture they will be competent to enter society as joint heirs and take part in the development." (P. 379)

And so he turns to the study circles:

"Accordingly it is easy to understand that the presentday social questions occupy a great space in the programmes of workers' education, and will, at least for a time, become of decisive importance in the course of the educational work that is carried on. That is literally the case in the study circles. These study circles supply the demand for self-activity, as they build in their Northern shape on perfect liberty in the free choice of courses of studies. Here we are face to face with a decisive question for workers' education, and indeed for all kinds of education, of the people's liberty or guardianship. Between liberty and guardianship there is no compromise. If we give the palm of victory to liberty, we must take the latter as it is with all its consequences. Study work, built on a voluntary participation and an open choice of study spheres, must be founded on the conviction that, with all its faults and mistakes, liberty is a better guide than any enlightened despotism. It is a natural and legitimate application of this principle of liberty that the workers choose to study social questions referring to their social conditions of life as workers. It follows that the most vital questions are drawn into the educational work." (Pp. 379–380)

In compliance with the views he advocated above, he denounced both the doctrine that education should be neutral and the doctrine that it should be for class struggle only. In its stead he raised "the principle of entire liberty in choice of the study interests" (P. 381). But he also made it abundantly clear that should workers want to use the resources of the educational world "in the daily struggles for tomorrow", they were at liberty to do so.

"These serious youths look upon the circle, the course, as an armoury. They wish to know, because they want to act. No wonder that they want to know more about these fields in which they are inclined to act. They search for clearness and continuity in their own problems. It is not for purely personal impartiality that such work is undertaken. It strives for party action founded on facts and commonsense." (P. 382)

It would, indeed, be very difficult to read into this statement anything but his belief in the study circle as a means of change.

While defending the rights of workers to decide on their own education, should they only confine themselves to social studies, he is convinced that, when the time comes, they will want other areas for their studies. He sees no risk if the needs of education are left in freedom:

"Every human being is a dwelling place for contrasts; he is not merely concerned with a struggle for clarity in his everyday life. As a contrast appears a double human need to complete the existence by going sometimes outside the daily interests. There is nothing absurd in the circles studying philosophical questions lying outside the high roads." (P. 382)

Basically, the views of Olsson and Sandler are still valid. Perhaps they overestimated the capability of study circles to plan their own studies without training in how to do so.

We should therefore do away with that kind of authority which fetters circles instead of liberating them. We should encourage that kind of education which is dependent on the conditions of study circle members and not on the circle leader's dictate, and which develops human-beings instead of inanimate things.

The international connection

The study circle idea is by no means confined to Sweden. We find it under different names using slightly different forms in different countries, where people feel the need to acquire knowledge to make social action possible. In fact, it can be found anywhere. But the size and impact on Swedish society of the study circle movement is what distinguishes it. This does not, however, make it a Swedish phenomenon suddenly appearing out of nowhere. On the contrary, its appearance on the Swedish stage has its own story or stories. These may be interesting, not only for the international connections they show, but also for revealing the conditions for the initial impetus and providing the basis for future development.

When we consider what was said by those involved in the creation of the study circle, the roots seem to fade away. Some state that the study circle idea emanated from USA, others that bible-study groups and the Oxford Movement provided the model, or that cooperative guilds and clubs in England gave the inspiration. Others still maintain that the whole idea saw the light of day in Sweden and that Oscar Olsson, "the father of the study circle", should be given the credit for the creation of the study circle. Be that as it may, but without Olsson's efforts the study circle movement may never have come off the ground. The case for the Swedish origin of the study circle was once vehemently defended by Olsson in a temperance journal as early as 1906 ("Unga Tankar" – in English "Young Thoughts" – as quoted by Ture Nerman in his book "Studiecirkeln"):

"Courses, study circles, reading circles, travelling libraries and the support of lecturing societies are not part of the programmes of the American study movement. And with the American courses – not always a tasty rehash of the wellknown Chautauqua Movement, whose methods, however, are in the main imitated – our Swedish ones, as said, have fortunately never had more in common than the name. The study movement of our country is Swedish from the beginning to the end, grown and adapted to Swedish conditions." (Pp. 76–77)

A few years later, however, he admitted that the study circle as first outlined by him in 1902 had its points of contact outside the International Order of Good Templars (the following quotations from the journal "Bokstugan" of 1921 respectively 1932 – the

title of the Swedish original in English, "The Book Cottage" – as reproduced in Nerman's book earlier presented):

*"Besides, Ariel (*a temperance journal, author's remark*) is quite right, when stating that the new study circle form of 1902 was the result of a development of several years and cannot be put to my account." (Nerman p. 78)*

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*"Had it (=*the study circle, author's remark*) not been brought about by one popular organization that year, it would certainly have been prompted by another one the following year." (Nerman p. 79)*

These quotations show how little Olsson had been concerned with the history of the study circle movement. His main undertaking obviously was to get it going. It is, however, quite interesting to look into how the study circle idea was "born" in Sweden, as this may tell us how a vague idea merged with organizational needs to result in a widespread adult education movement.

It may be justified to let this discussion be further preceded by a brief sketch of some relevant conditions in Sweden during the latter part of the 19th century, because these may partly explain why the study circle so easily became rooted in Sweden.

People were to a large extent literate because of the four-year primary school reform introduced in 1842. Unconventional education methods were used early by the folk high schools, of which the first ones, inspired by the Danish Gruntvig folk high schools, commenced their work in the 1860's. These schools from the beginning made use of mock community council meetings in order to teach its students parliamentary procedures. Academic lecturing was criticized already in 1880 in a Swedish journal for adult education (quotation from "Svenska folkhögskolan 100 år", Del III: Uddevalla 1968. Title of the Swedish original in English: "The Swedish folk high school 100 years"; part III):

"Should the folk high school teacher enter the university trail and hence his audience be seated protected from all what might be called questions, somebody or other would before long in a practical way remind him of the necessity for the teacher to listen and see whether he is reading for himself or has his listeners accompanying him on the tour." (P. 127)

These examples from the history of the folk high schools indicate that, as a means of involving students and increasing their activity, they were anxious to use conversation and dialogues in adult education instead of pure lecturing. And while the schools were reducing their reliance on lectures, they were at the same time making an increased use of textbooks. It is, by the way, in

this latter respect that the Swedish folk high schools came to differ from the Danish ones.

The development of the study circle movement must also be seen against the background of how a relatively little, undeveloped country with rather well defined and rigid traditional social barriers, during the middle and latter half of the 19th century, became overpopulated. This caused among other things a considerable emigration to the land of promise, i.e. America. There they came into a melting-pot with people from many different parts of the world, where what was created by man's hard work became his mark of nobility. The social background of his upbringing mattered little. There they found freedom to worship, which they did not have at home. There they participated in creating a new society.

It is also a well known fact, that the Swedish religious revivalist and temperance movements nearly all had their roots in USA.

The rumours of the New World were carried not only by letters from its settlers but also by visitors and travellers. One of those who travelled "overthere" was Edvard Wavrinsky. He was a former Swedish officer in an artillery regiment and a civil engineer who became involved in workers' education and in the temperance work of the International Order of Goods Templars. He served as the International Chief Templar 1905–1920 (Olsson held the same position 1930–1947). Being the International Counsellor for the Swedish Grand Lodge of IOGT he attended the conference of the international Grand Lodge of the Order at Chicago 1893. On his way home, he visited the study centre Chautauqua in the north-western part of the state of New York. He was so greatly impressed, that he later the same year wrote an article about it. He makes a conclusion of his observations of the courses as carried out at Chautauqua (in "Julbrasan" 1893 published by the Swedish IOGT. Title of the Swedish original in English: "At the Christmas Fireside"):

*"I cannot deny, that I very much doubted the results of these courses – so long as I only studied them from some distance. While still in Des Moines (*at an IOGT course, author's remark*) I was at the beginning inclined to characterize the matter merely as fraud the way it was carried out at that place. But I considered it my duty to make myself familiar with the idea, and I am now completely committed to it. I myself have registered as a student, and I intend, should it be possible for me, to have this idea realized within the Swedish Grand Lodge, or otherwise as a private enterprise.*

"On the whole *it is here only a question of* home reading courses *and,* it should be noted, *one shall not cherish the illusion, that a thorough knowledge will be gained from these courses by others but those who possess full qualifications for them as well as perseverance and conscientiousness enough not to try to gain at bargain price a reputation for knowledge they do not possess.*

"Entire lodges, or at least the most intelligent among them, shall form a reading circle and encourage and guide one another. When difficulties occur, they shall write to the Chancellor, who will guide them, or address themselves to any scientifically educated person from the community, where they stay, and look for assistance. There are no impossibilities, much depends on the guidance.

"The 'educated' of our time do not want and cannot go with us; the total temperance from intoxicants is to them a proof of weakness and nothing else. – Accordingly, the bearers of th: temperance reforms have no choice but to acquire culture and influence themselves, a culture which levels the class difference, and an influence, which is built on the foundation of proven knowledge, developed in a life in accordance with the laws of Nature." (P. 10)

As in a vision he saw how such reading circles could achieve the knowledge necessary for making the Order independent of "educated" people, hostile to the movement. Books were instead proposed to be used as intermediary agents, now and then supported by advice from the outside.

The Swedish Order had, in fact, before this, already established libraries and had been involved for some time in book sales to its membership. And when study circles were introduced later, they started libraries wherever possible. This usage of books was further strengthened when the Swedish Parliament in 1912 passed a municipal library law also supporting public libraries run by voluntary organizations. This law, it should be mentioned, was in many respects inspired by American public libraries but also by Oscar Olsson and his circle libraries.

The suspicion against "educated" people as aired in the quoted examples by the folk high school representative and by Wavrinsky deserves further attention (note, that Wavrinsky did not graduate from a university!). Statements similar to those quoted are by no means unusual. Many representatives of Swedish mass movements still regard with hesitation university educated people, who have not won their spurs within the movement. They are often assumed to lack experience from "real life" and show arrogance in their contacts with less educated people. Consequently, those with university exams "do not understand" the problems and requirements of the members of the mass movements. One may conclude that the suspicion is deeply rooted in experience, which may be illustrated by the fact that it was first in the sixties and seventies that Swedish universities ventured to make some substantial research in labour movements matters. That the mass movements, since their inception, are strong supporters of the notion that real competence shall always supercede formal schooling, can partly be explained by the views presented above and partly by the common experience of paper merit as being doubtful

qualification. But once university men are accepted – and it is not unusual – they can reach high positions within the movements.

One may argue that this hesitant attitude towards people coming straight from the universities would mean isolation from the sources of knowledge and wisdom there. True, but it also brought some positive effects, such as stronger bonds of solidarity. It further meant freedom from the beaten paths of the universities. It is, for example, well known that the folk high schools had a hearty appetite for unconventional solutions to educational problems. The positive reception of the study circle method by popular organizations can also be explained by this.

However, as shown with his proposal, Wavrinsky became the first to clearly state, that the education and training of the membership of a voluntary organization must rest with the members themselves. But whether the study circle is a Swedish invention or not, is more of an academic question. It is, though, interesting to note its international ties. They are undoubtedly there.

The eight principles of study circles

If you look at chameleons, they seem capable of dressing themselves in any colour, and yet they are easy to distinguish from any other kind of lizard. The tongues, that strike like lightning, the slow-motion rocking movements and the tails make them, together with their ability to change skin-colour, a unique animal. To some extent this can, in a corresponding way, be said to be true about study circles. They look very different, but when their work is more closely analyzed against the views presented earlier, the differences fade.

Viewed from some distance the content of the concept "study circle" is by no means uniformly conceived. It has shifted from time to time, from person to person, and yet, the similarities seem to dominate over the differences. Where there have been differences, they seem to concern the planning of the studies, and whether these should follow clearly-outlined course syllabi or not.

At the extreme we find Oscar Olsson, who puts the emphasis on social interaction and in creating an interest in self-education. He expresses this in his contribution to the International Handbook on Adult Education, published 1929 in connection with the earlier mentioned World Conference on Adult Education:

"The Swedish Study-Circle Movement strives to bring all citizens actively and consistently together to co-operate in the work for higher self-education. It aims at the growth of personality and the development of the highest spiritual values in man: longing for truth, passion for righteousness, joy of beauty, the sense of responsibility and solidarity, etc. But at the same time the study circle wishes to give practical knowledge and training for co-operation in social work.

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"The aim of the study-circle movement must be to create an atmosphere of general cultural interest and good citizenship as well as to offer instruction in special matters.

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"Trying to gather in all citizens, the study circles have from the beginning come to the places where the people already are grouped by their work and interests in social, political or economic associations.

– In that way, adult education of the study circles is naturally bound to a group with the same social interests, and thus it gets deep roots in real life. It becomes part of the worker's ordinary life and interests, of his every-day habits and intercourse. The study circle may simply be the ordinary group of friends and comrades, regularly coming together to satisfy man's natural interests of culture and education. As in old Sparta all citizens were divided into dining-clubs in accordance with their companionship in arms, the study circles are the masses of modern society divided into 'spiritual dining-clubs' in accordance with their companionship in social and educational work." (Pp. 412–413)

An intermediary position was taken by Gunnar Hirdman, for a long period the director of studies at the Workers' Educational Association (ABF). He has published his views in a number of pamphlets. I have chosen to let his views be represented by some quotations from his essay on the Art of Conversation ("Samtalets konst. Något om studiecirkelns metoder". ABFs Centralbyrå, 3:e omarbetade upplagan, Stockholm 1945. Title of Swedish original in English, "The Art of Conversation. About the methods of the study circle"). He begins with a reminder of the value of the structured conversation in the study circle and notes that it is vanishing from adult education as arranged by the large popular movements. And he continues with a request for something of the approach used before in the traditional study circle:

"When one observes a clear tendency towards a division of the study group into active talkers and passive listeners, or into teachers who teach, and pupils who are taught, and when study circles also develop on similar lines, then I have considered it proper to remind the participants of the more original approach in the study circle. Whatever the development, one must be within one's rights to call for a maintenance of the old characteristics of the study circle: companionship, community of work, self-activity by all, mutual help in solving problems." (P. 3)

But he does not want to abolish the new approaches. He wants to create a new spirit in them, and thus revitalize them and bring them closer to the ideals of the Labour Movement:

"Don't let us quarrel about whether it is proper or not proper to use the name study circle only for such study groups, who work according to what was originally meant to be the study circle approach. Neither should we quarrel about to what we should rebaptize the pure lesson groups, the discussion groups, or the lecture circles.

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"The lecture has its value, speech also, the discussion is invaluable and even the dissertation has its meaning, teaching is necessary and

the lesson is a form of social intercourse between the teacher and the students from which we will never escape, but I will here only remind the reader that the conversation also has its function and value as a form for studies and cultural aspiration. Provide more room for conversation in our cultural work!" (P. 3)

The need for realism in his day-to-day work, so manifestly shown above, did not prevent Hirdman from painting his picture of what should be meant by a study circle. By doing so he created the possibly classical definition of a study circle. Sven-Arne Stahre, Hirdman's successor at ABF, reproduced it in his brochure about the study circle leader ("Studiecirkelledaren". Stockholm 1955. Title of Swedish original in English, "The study circle leader"):

"The study circle represents the principles of mutual assistance and cooperation, applied to the striving for knowledge and culture. It demands from everyone according to his ability, and gives to everyone according to his needs. Every member should know, that study implies pain, but that joint work makes the pain less, the reward larger, and gives humour, happiness and stimulation to the companionship in addition." (P. 8)

The active role of the study circle has been stressed by Stahre (as quoted by Fingal Ström in "Spela i cirkel", Stockholm 1952. Title of Swedish original in English, "Playing in study circles".):

"The study circle shall achieve its educational results through a process of continuous searching." (P 17)

Little has so far been said about the necessity for planning studies. This demand has most likely its roots in the fact that study circles for a very long period have been government-supported. The Swedish Government defined what kind of study circles should qualify for government money by describing the study circle in parliamentary acts. And these acts have since the forties demanded that the studies should be planned. Thus, according to the government this is what should characterize a study circle:

*"A circle of companions for joint studies performed according to a plan for prereported subject or problem area." (*Svensk författningssamling/Swedish Statute-Book, 1963:463*)*

If the views quoted above are significant – and why shouldn't they? – they clearly show the distance between the visionary pioneers' request for liberty and the government's demand for control. It is true that the government at a very early stage (in 1912) handed over the responsibility for this control to the

organizations, for exemple to IOGT and ABF. These organizations have always been anxious to maintain control, if for nothing else but for the fear that the government might withdraw or reduce its financial support, or take over control itself, should the study circles choose to tread unexpected paths.

Rickard Sandler, who also was the first director of studies of ABF and its president 1919–1938 demanded in the quoted speech full liberty for the study circles, while Gunnar Hirdman – fully aware of the principles of the study circle – seemed to have been forced to resign to the factual circumstances.

It would be very interesting to study – if enough information exists for such a study – to what extent this control has influenced the demands by the organizations for all plans of study to be approved or disapproved in advance by them, *and* the all too common use of teachers and class-room methods in study circles.

Byström also notes in his book (cf.p.7) that it is not only the dependence of leaders and members on school patterns which make so many study circles "derail".

"but also the external conditions of the studies, such as they are defined by the statutes for government subsidies, can contribute to such a development." (P. 117)

His observation is corroborated by the experiences reported above in the presentation of the dualistic views of Hirdman. But the problem goes further back. In his booklet from 1921 about study work ("Vårt Studiearbete." Studiehandbok utgiven med rådgivande inledning om arbetarklassens studiearbete av Nils Flyg. Frams Förlag. Stockholm 1921. Title of Swedish original in English, "Our study work"), Nils Flyg – a well-known politician, who changed his party affiliation several times (that year he was a communist) – paints a picture many will recognise:

"The School Circle. This is what I would like to call those new kinds of circles, which have emerged during the last few years, particularly in cities and larger densely built-up communities. They are, strictly speaking, not study circles in the original sense of this concept, but small private evening class substitutes. I have here before dealt somewhat with how they, viewed purely theoretical, bring the study activities of the working class to a side track. Just a few other points of view to that one. First this one, that these circles anew seat the workers at school. By so doing, they completely cut off what in my mind is most beautiful and most valuable in the entire study circle movement, namely its capacity to arouse an awareness, that one should and can press forward and develop using one's own energy. Not only go by and be modelled by the one treatment after the other one. Already we have, as a class, been seated too long at school, and these teachers and leaders have nothing to give us of what we need first and foremost.

"And to this point of view, these kinds of circles encourage egoistical studies, while the study circle movement on the other hand from the beginning wanted to be an organizational form serving the class.
"And, finally, not the least important point of view. Should the notion succeed that there will be no benefit from membership in a circle unless this is lead by a teacher, then the entire study circle movement, has been dealt a deathblow. There are places, where this idea is deeply rooted.

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"There are subjects, such as languages, which cannot be studied without teachers. But these can be considerably better studied in another setting than the one of the study circle. The workers need, indeed, first to master the language which the capitalists of their country understand.

"That is why I by no means condemn and reject the school circle completely. It should just not be allowed to dominate. Its members should be or have been members of a circle too, where more stress is put on the class stryggle. And its members should also during their language studies, should it be such a group, have development and increased knowledge for the struggle and goal of the class as an object for their studies." (Pp. 17–18)

Critical views on how study circle work has been carried out, such as those of Gunnar Hirdman and Nils Flyg, have helped the study circle tradition to survive and, in fact, to thrive amidst all control measures. But the major factor has been, and is still, the support of all the people who preferred the study circle method to the traditional evening class sessions.

To what extent government statutes have come to influence the methods used, is not clear. It will have to be remembered that the statutes do not demand that the study circle shall provide a plan with details. Just a plan, any plan. The statutes give free play, however, for those who wish to put a strait-jacket on study circles, and yet they simultaneously open doors for completely free planning. It is not, of course, so easy for them to exploit that opportunity. Nobody has denied a need for some kind of a plan. But people have differed when it comes to who should make the plan, how detailed it should be, whether or not it should be supported by a textbook, and how consistent it should be. It seems to be a fair approach to request as much liberty as possible for the study circle when it comes to planning.

The demand for planning studies easily accommodates the condition that studies must have some duration. We can always quarrel about what should be confined in the concept "duration", but it ought not to be difficult to agree on that one or two study circle meetings will not constitute any duration as far as studies are

concerned. I doubt, however, that even four meetings will accommodate planned studies, if we can agree that these shall cover at least a minor topic from its introduction, through its being related to the circle members' experiences, working with it (that is the actual learning) and the application of the newly acquired knowledge, up to the assessment of its possible usefulness and value to the members. We could, using other words, say that when knowledge is put into new wooden casks, it will take some time before these are tight enough to retain the knowledge. We thus have to allow some time to pass before we can safely conclude that we have performed any studies.

I don't think it is necessary or desirable to request that study circles should meet so or so many times in order to qualify. I merely indicate some matters above that ought to be considered when we talk about how many meetings there should be. And these matters are not the only criteria to consider. Let us use the study circle at Motala in Sweden as an example. It started in 1954 and is still continuing (see for instance the ABF journal "Fönstret", no. 12 1979, p. 23). If this circle should be content with spending only four sessions on a topic, it can surely be said to perform planned studies, in contrast to any other circle which has met for only four evenings with all its members initially unknown to one another.

An old Swedish rule demands that a study circle shall have to carry out its studies of a topic for at least 10 sessions, each one of at least 75 minutes' duration, in order to qualify for government grants. But this should not be interpreted to imply that there are no planned studies, should the circle instead meet eight or nine times only. This rule can best be described as an administrative compromise between educational associations' demand for liberty and the government's claim for a guarantee that the taxpayers' money is properly used. This limited confidence in the study circles' capability to carry out planned studies, is by no means specific only to the government. Sponsoring organizations, now and then, show this lack of confidence in their membership by demanding studies to be strictly performed according to centrally (and, in fact, not always very well) produced plans of studies. Many a bureaucrat involved in adult education planning would do well in seriously contemplating the experience behind the words of Rickard Sandler (quoted in its larger context earlier): "Liberty is a better guide than any enlightened despotism".

Books were, from the beginning, such an essential part of study circles, that it is doubtful whether any study circle movement would ever have developed without them. And they run through the study circle work all the time. They have, however, changed character during the years by being more and more tailor-made for use by study circles. And I think that Oscar Olsson would have looked upon quite a number of the books of today with mixed feelings. His vision of the use of books in study circles differs from

the set patterns favoured by today's coursebook-writers. His views, although "outdated", are, however, well worth taking a second look at, if for nothing else but the fact that he made books become an integral part of study circles. But he did not accept all kinds of books. Fiction, the real books and, to some extent, popular science literature were approved of but schoolbooks never, as shown by the following extract from his book "Folkets bildningsarbete" (Title of the Swedish original in English, "The Education Work of the People") from 1911:

"Based upon experiences, obtained by work with study courses, particularly the one in Lund (This was the first study circle of 1902, author's remark), *there developed a new education movement,* the study circle. *Here the chief stress was laid upon the members' own activity being the only guarantee for maintaining their interest. The teacher and the school-book were done away with; the members were guided straight to the very source of knowledge, the book, they could immediately set to work at real direct education issues." (P.35)*

But anxious as he was to maintain the feeling of security for circle members, he wanted to advance in small steps. By this means he hoped to establish an interest in reading not only fiction but ultimately also quite advanced scientific books:

"The first condition in order to successfully accustom the worker to work with books, is to give him books, he really will read. Most solid books are completely useless and valueless to the one who cannot study them. Now, we have one type of literature, which can fascinate even the beginner, and that is fiction. This depends upon the fact, that fiction is the spontaneous expression of life, approaching us with the colour of life and with the warmth of life. For that reason only, fiction becomes the most useful and valuable literature when it comes to acquainting people with the world of books. (Pp. 43–44)

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"So the worker often experiences quite seriously the major gaps in his knowledge when he is dealing with fiction. He is soon impelled to try to fill these, is thus carried by fiction straight to the literature 'which provides knowledge'. (P. 55)

"The study circle should yearly, from its first working-year acquire some scientific works; there will always be found some member who finds an interest in them and who can benefit from them to some extent, and several members will be added every year. This part of the list of books of the study circle should expand by degrees at the expence of fiction." (P. 56)

Good books, good literature put in the hands of people who can act and reason sensibly, is far superior to mediocre teachers' silly interpretations – and there is no reason why this should not be the case when outlined as above by Olsson. It is not that he believed only in books. No, far from that, he saw the strength of the combination of books, people's experience, common sense, and the conversation among the members of the circle.

This importance of books, or more precisely, of printed study materials, known from long experience extending over decades, is further corroborated by one of the many interesting study circle research projects that of late has been published in Sweden (Rapport nr 13 inom forsknings- och utvecklingsprojektet Vuxenutbildning-vardagsinlärning: Christina Eldh och Mauritz Sköld, "Studiecirkelmässighet och vardagsanknytning i studiematerialet". Brevskolan, Stockholm 1980. Title of Swedish original in English: Report no. 13 of the research and development project "Adult education – everyday learning": "Study circleness and everyday associations in study material". An English summary of the project is published by Brevskolan: Torbjörn Stockfeldt and Mauritz Sköld, "Everyday Learning – The basis for Adult Education". Stockholm 1981):

"Most study circle leaders and participants feel themselves completely deserted, if there is no printed material." (P. 10)

This excursion into the past has not been undertaken in order to paint a historical background. Hence, it cannot be said to give a picture of the development of the study circle from its very first tottering steps to the movement of today which enrols one million people. No, my motive has been another, namely to show the study circle as an integral part of a continuing democratization process, providing citizens with knowledge and skills for active involvement in societal issues, and a strengthening and development of individuals working together for a better society. This role of the study circle was, as has been demonstrated earlier in this section, indissolubly associated with the development of the democratic mass movements of the 19th and 20th centuries in Sweden. And although we today worship the names of other prophets, e.g., Freire and Illeris, their messages lose some of their originality when confronted with the ideas of Olsson and Sandler. We may, however, do well to bear in mind the possibility that the similarities are by no means circumstantial, but perhaps the result of perceived inequalities among human beings and of observations of people deprived of human dignity. It should, therefore, be appropriate to quote another part of the recent ambitious study "Adult education – everyday learning", where Mauritz Sköld sums up what should be demanded from adult education (Rapport nr 11 i Vuxenutbildning-vardagsinlärning: Mauritz Sköld, "Den otillräckliga vuxenutbildningen". Brevskolan, Stockholm 1979.

Title of Swedish original in English: Report no. 11 in Adult Education – Everyday Learning, "The inadequate adult education".):

"What adult education requires, is a strategy that brings knowledge

- *to act and change* instead of only to know and understand,
- *of development, liberation and creativity* instead of passivity and hidden oppression,
- *of social intercourse and collective development* instead of competition, isolation and individualization,
- *which is intelligible* instead of being a mystification of things and events, and
- *which demolishes myths and prejudices about inequalities of man* instead of legitimizing the classification and evaluation of man into different social and material levels." (P. 49)

Proceeding from these observations and views of the study circle, it should be possible to arrive at the following eight principles:

1. The principle of equality and democracy

The work of the study circle is based on the concept of equality among the circle members or participants, one of whom is the study circle leader, *and* in a belief of the human being as a reasoning creature.

The leader is sometimes compared to a chair of an organization – he/she can propose and give advice, but the actual power belongs to the membership. In other words, democracy and democratic principles are essential for the work of the study circle. Note, this shall not be taken as a justification for using formal parliamentary producers. There is no reasons why a spirit of informality should not always reign in small groups like study circles.

This approach is, in fact, very old and has been employed since the days of Plato, the Athenian philosopher, whose dialogues have found admirers all through the centuries. It was he who said, that men know, reason and act intelligently in a world not wholly incomprehensible. The study circle leader's role is very much inspired by these dialogues.

Dialogues mean conversation, not discussion – an exchange of views and information in a relaxed manner. One can therefore say, that in a study circle all the members are at one and the same time both teachers and students.

One can conclude from this, that lecturing and other customs taken from the non-egalitarian class teaching are badly suited to this principle. Of course, a guest may be invited to give some kind of a lecture or assistance, but he/she will then have to act as in-

structed by the members. Admittedly, problems can occur when studies have to rely heavily on "experts".

2. The principle of liberation

The work in a study circle shall, proceeding from the members' experiences and knowledge, liberate their inherent assets and resources. Commencing with their everyday experiences, with identified injustices and with wrongful conditions they will bring new knowledge into the circle by means of which the members can influence reality and be influenced by it. The society is part of that reality.

We may thus say that it is in study circles where we "partly develop methods and tools for exploring the world around us, partly can work up, interprete, report and take a stand to the sequel of facts which have been collected". (P. 7 of Report 13 of the project "Adult Education – Everyday Learning". Cf. p. 23 of this chapter).

3. The principle of cooperation and companionship

The work and procedures of a study circle are characterized by cooperation and companionship, of working together towards mutually shared and resolved objects. Thus people who participate in study circles, are companions, friends. They help, instead of competing with each other. They share the progress and setbacks of their joint work. Such study situations provide security for all and contribute to openness. This, in turn, will make knowledge about oneself and others an asset for the studies.

The social role played by the study circle cannot be emphasized enough. It is a means for human contacts and for pleasant human relations. That is why we work informally in the circles and frequently consider recreation and refreshments as part of our meetings.

It goes without saying from the above that any promotion of individual advance inside or outside the circle is out of the question.

4. The principle of the freedom of the study circle and its right to set its objective

The objectives of each individual study circle are to be made, approved or determined by the members of the circle, and shall rest on their needs and wishes, that is the life of the members. Such objectives generally coincide with the ones of their organization. Therefore, the members will strengthen this organization by their mutual work according to the objectives they have chosen. Freedom walks hand in hand with responsibility.

The very fact that the study circle is an autonomous body is not to be interpreted to mean that no frames exist for it. A study circle formed within an organization and perhaps financially supported by it, will, of course, always have to work within a frame set by the objectives and goals of that organization. For example, it would be ridiculous if study circle members supported by a co-operative society were to study how they can set up a private company in competition with their own society.

But it is the members of the study circle together who will be responsible for how they work and how the studies are carried out. This can never be delegated to another body without infringing seriously on the freedom of the study circle.

This principle obviously excludes any group, for whom the objectives have been determined by external institutions, such as is the case with the so-called quality-of-worklife circles, which aim at improved production as asked for by the arranging companies.

5. The principle of continuity and planning

The study circle approach sets no fixed upper and lower limits for the number of times a circle should meet. Prevailing circumstances will decide. But the time alotted to a topic or theme must allow not only for learning opportunities but also for a conversation that prevents "one-sidedness, self-sufficiency and overrating of one's own point of view" (Oscar Olsson in the International Handbook on Adult Education, London 1929. P. 413). Hence, a series of at least five meetings in considered a minimum.

But continuity shall also be taken in a broader sense: the studies in the circle shall create and maintain an interest in further studies – a future penetration deeper into the topic studies, or a venture to choose new for fields for the studies.

Continuity means that studies have to be organized and planned. The study goals set or considered and approved by the circle imply that studies must follow some kind of a path – a plan. This is usually the best instrument to secure that goals are approached and attained. It can and will, very often, have to be reconsidered. The original plan/goal may have been unrealistic, conditions can have changed etc.

In emphasizing this need for a plan, study circles generally deviate from discussion groups and radio-listening groups, which often study unsystematically.

6. The principle of active participation

It is so obvious that if the study circle member is not actively involved, there will be no cooperation, no joint responsibility, no conversation and, hence, no study circle.

The members' active contribution is the block upon which are built, not only study circles, but the democracy of organizations.

People also learn best when they are active. They cannot share responsibilities as members without acting, without personally taking a stand.

Further, experience has shown that a broad conversation is difficult to maintain in too small groups. Likewise, the large groups provide small opportunities for all to participate. The interaction within the entire group will be reduced and hampered, resulting in fewer social contacts.

That is why one often considers five members to be the lower limit of a study circle and 15–20 members the upper one.

7. The principle of printed study material

All study circles should be equipped with printed and duplicated study materials, which taken together should cover the intended number of meetings of the individual circle. Such study materials can sometimes be very simple – just a bunch of pamphlets or extracts from journals and newspapers – sometimes quite advanced, such as scientific textbooks. Whatever is used as a source of information (to be supplemented by the experience of the members) and as support for the planned studies – these provide a scene for the actions of the study circles, where experiences and views can be tested and developed.

8. The principle of change and action

Unless the approach of study circles yields something in exchange for the efforts of the individual members and their supporting organization, circles would not flourish. Neither would this happen if they were only concerned with learning for its own sake. But when circles also strive for change and action, the learning will not only be more "profitable" but simultaneously also more meaningful. For individuals, this can result in personal enrichment and an improvement of their environment. For the organizations, the harvest reaped from the members' learning will increase their unity and strength. Hence, this principle is essential for successful circle studies.

Four approaches for study circles

The study circle method allows a considerable leeway for different subjects, working areas and interests. While one study circle may be absorbed in a study of the economic forces governing modern society, another one focuses its attention on recent trends in modern literature, and yet another one is concerned with solving a problem, for example an environmental question. Still others try to trace the historical background of their community, or study the way a trade union is organized and how it works. Additionally, study circles can be devoted to language learning, or the development of an increased sensitivity to works of art, be it literature, drama, paintings, crafts or music. In fact, it is not the subject matter which sets the limits for the study circles. They can study anything.

Certain approaches are, however, more common than others. And we may benefit from giving them some extra thought. I have chosen to present a division of study circles into *thematic, course, debate* and *research circles*, fully aware that other divisions can be equally justified, such as the division into problem-solving and skill-training circles. But I have abstained as any and all divisions cannot be anything but artificial.

The division used here has endeavoured to indicate some major possibilities and approaches, in order to present a rough picture of what kind of studies can be incorporated in a study circle. The reader would be wise to keep in mind, however, that there are study circles whose approach may belong to more than one category. For example, a study circle concerned with amateur theatre can at one and the same time be both a thematic circle and a research circle.

The thematic circle approach

The work of a thematic circle centres around a theme selected by the circle members. It aims at enhancing the members' insight into the theme chosen, increasing their awareness or providing them with new outlooks, and raising a feeling of satisfaction and an appetite for further studies. But it also aims at setting the members free to greater participation in societal activities, doing away with any unwarranted fear of presenting personal opinions in a social context.

The thematic circle is here illustrated by a circle studying an author, his novels and short stories. Preparing themselves between meetings the members will present the author and give their own experiences and observations of what they have read. They can do this in turns and make their presentations orally or in written form.

The oral presentation can either be free and based on notes, considered as carefully as possible, or be a small essay read aloud to the group. The former should not be an attempt to imitate a lecture but just be an oral exercise for the member – a simple but useful training in coordinating thought and speech.

Written summaries or comments can be composed in many ways. For a beginner, it may be a good idea to try the letter form, where a summary is presented as a letter directed to one of the members of the circle. Or it can be shaped as a newspaper review. Or . . .

It is, in fact, also quite beneficial to use part of the meeting for reading aloud parts of the text under review. This can be the first step for a shy and shaky member in overcoming inhibitions from speaking at organization meetings or in the public. But there is no real study circle meeting unless the summaries etc. and the reading aloud is accompanied by a general conversation developed out of this and a friendly scrutiny of the contributions made to the circle meeting.

The value of circle meetings of this kind will be further enhanced if they are recorded in some simple minutes to be presented at a following meeting. The job of "chairing" the meeting should not automatically fall upon the study circle leader. The recording as well as the "chairing" tasks should alternate amongst the members.

With this approach – which is particularly suitable for those who are new to study circle activities – the study circle should improve several skills:

- Writing and wording
- Speaking to comrades and friends
- Summarizing points for reviews
- Acting as a leader of a meeting, as a chair.

The studies in the circle will further bring knowledge of the author and an insight into the books studied, and – hopefully – arouse an interest in literary works and future studies.

The course circle approach

The course circle – the name chosen due to a lack of better alternatives – can be a one-time event, but more commonly it is a part of a series of circles (two or more), which sometimes can be parts

of an education system of an organization. The objectives of such a circle will have to consider preceding and/or consecutive circles. They will thus have to be more elaborately planned than is the case of the thematic circle.

The course circle particularly suits those who know what they want to learn or achieve, be it based on their need for knowledge or skills. For instance, it can intend to make it possible for them to participate actively in the work of their organization. Or people may have joined the circle because of personally experienced needs.

The plan of study for a course circle can be produced in advance by a sponsoring organization or created by the members. In the former case the circle members, of course, have the privilege to make changes in the plan. It should, however, be noted that it is a sometimes very difficult task for inexperienced people to compose plans of study or to make considerable alterations in a readymade plan of study – for a further discussion, see the section about planning in study circles, p. 60 and subseq.

The study process of a course circle has three phases:

1. *The individual preparations between the meetings*, which may consist of studying relevant sections of a textbook for the forthcoming meeting or of carrying out assignments such as collecting supplementary facts from libraries, from newspaper offices, from interviewing people etc.

2. *The conversation and work at the meeting*, where the knowledge is shared and the skills in focus are consolidated. This can be accompanied by summaries, resolutions and reports to a possible sponsoring organization.

   Essential observations and conclusions of the circle should be minuted. Several reasons can be forwarded for this. Here we will be concerned particularly with three of them: (a) minutes constitute an important source of information for members who have been absent from meetings, (b) the reading of the minutes from the previous meeting will reinforce what was learnt at that meeting and remind the members of resolutions which should be acted upon, and (c) the complete set of minutes can serve as a means of refreshing experiences made during the circle meetings or as a document for the future – "this is what we did".

3. *The assessment of the progress of the circle studies*, which is some kind of a continuous evaluation. Two aspects deserve special attention: (a) does the circle work according to its plan of study, and (b) are its objectives still relevant? Should the answer to any or both of these questions be in the negative, the circle will have to try to find the circumstances that interfered. These being identified, the circle should try to resolve this by

possible remedying action: Can the actual circumstances be manipulated? Is it necessary to alter the plan of study, or must the objectives be revised? (For example, were these too optimistic or too pessimistic?)

Subjects or fields of studies for course circles are seemingly without limit. Crafts, social science or language alike can be studied successfully. But there may well crop up problems which cannot be whisked away. For example, it may now and then be necessary to have access to knowledgeable people for some subjects. But as many of them most likely are heavily indoctrinated by many years of formal schooling, they may become poor study circle leaders. A better way may be to invite them to come to the study circle as guest speakers, following the rules of the circle and being guided by the member who is responsible for that actual meeting. Such an approach should limit the teacher-pupil pattern which unfortunately is far too common in language study circles.

It also happens that course circle studies are combined with correspondence studies, where the circle collectively, or the members individually, answer questions or present their views on issues as requested by those responsible for organizing this kind of correspondence study. Not only can they become good substitutes to calling in experts – who may be rare phenomenon in many places – by providing the study circle with assistance and answers to their questions. But they can also be very useful for organizations who want a feedback from their membership.

The debate circle approach

That the debate circle is considered separately can be justified using more than one reason. First of all, its activities are rather more directed towards discussions and the parliamentary process than on conversation. Secondly, it may change the theme from the meeting to the next. This shall not, however, be taken to mean that the meetings lack coherence. It is rather the reverse. Throughout the meetings there should be a continuous exercise in submitting proposals and points of views, and in appraising arguments.

The circle deals with oral presentations, parliamentary procedures and critical thinking. But not only this, the members gather relevant information from different sources for their discussions. In other words, they themselves should find out the facts they intend to use, critically assess these and put them into a context.

A debate circle is quite naturally very involved in structural and planned discussions. Besides training the study circle members to be skilled debaters basing their contributions on facts, it will, of course, also increase the members' knowledge of the subject discussed. They ought therefore to choose themes which concern

them – such as unemployment, adult education, cooperatives versus private enterprises, taxes, social welfare etc.

By borrowing literature from friends and libraries or by purchases the circle will – perhaps advised by a competent person – acquire the literature necessary to give the pros and cons for the theme chosen. This literature can consist of nearly anything: brochures, pamphlets, scientific reports, parliamentary reports, newspaper and magazine cuttings etc. Having collected the materials the study circle will then proceed by assorting this into a topical or chronological order, after which the literature is divided according to the meetings planned for the debate theme.

The studies will be facilitated if the circle is large enough – about twelve members – to allow a division of the members into two groups – supporters and opponents. Each group may within itself appoint representatives to a possible mediating stream, an often useful measure. The two groups – the supporters and the opponents – should meet separately between the "plenary" meetings of the circle. Each group will by turns appoint the member who is to introduce the views of the group, be it for a debate or for a hearing.

The work of the debate circle can be further developed by subdividing the major groups into fictional parliamentary committees. Such an exercise will provide additional insights into parliamentary processes. Naturally, the members will by turns serve as chair and secretaries.

The circle approach often requires that the members can participate in a discussion without being too personally affected. Further, what should matter is not to find out the most crushing replies to stun any opponent, but to separate facts, opinions and sentiments and present these in a sensible manner.

It goes without saying that this kind of study circle will improve the member's capability to participate in the business of his/her organization.

The research circle approach

Judging from what is known, the research circle is a rather recent approach. It often starts with a problem which concerns those in the study circle: How did our organization become what it is today? What pollutes our river? Who own the natural resources in our community? What caused our jobs to become what they are today?

Such questions may be asked because the circle members want to know why exactly their organization so successfully managed to become a strong force in community life, or what made swimming in the river a health hazard, or who holds the rights to the coal deposits, or what is behind the transfer of a production line to another factory.

These are but a few examples that could be listed. Sometimes a

book can yield the answer but most often we will have to dig out the information ourselves by our own means. Other people can be either indifferent or negative to any kind of investigation.

The Swedish author, Sven Lindqvist, contributed much to the recent boom in this circle form by his book "Gräv där du står. Hur man utforskar ett jobb", Stockholm 1978 (Available in English manuscript – "Dig where you stand. How to research a job" – but as yet/1989, only published in Swedish and in German languages).

The problem experienced is the starting point for a research circle. This fact ensures the commitment of the study circle members. The objective of the studies usually requires the membership to acquire a valid knowledge of the problem and what it is related to. But in the process it often extends towards solving the problem or acting upon it. The very fact that any action will stem from a group and not a single individual adds further weight to such extensions.

The work of a research circle passes through a series of phases which gradually merge into each other. The very *first* one is an explorative phase where the circle members try to make a rough demarcation of the problem area and of the members' particular abilities and interests. Here the circle estimates what resources it has and what must be made available to it. In the case of the circle wishing to penetrate the problem of their polluted river, it may be a question of finding out:

- How serious is the pollution?
- How are the members of the circle affected by the pollution?
- Which parts of the river are polluted?
- From where may the pollution come?
- What rules and laws govern sewage discharge in rivers?
- What knowledge and "expertise" do the circle member posses?
- Which study preferences have the members expressed?
- Will the circle have access to registers and other information sources?
- Where can the circle obtain technical/scientific advice and help?
- From where can it get financial support?

The *second* phase consist of narrowing down the problem to a size that can be managed by the study circle. There is nothing wrong in a study circle aiming high – the feeling of undertaking a challenge can, indeed, be very stimulating – but care must be taken so that the objectives are not raised so high that the circle obviously will fail to reach them, thus risking to end in depressing failure.

It may be rewarding to break the entire and often general problem into a series of more narrowly defined sub-problems to be worked with by turns. As this phase is crucial to the progress of the circle, the group would most likely benefit from temporarily bringing in a scientifically trained person *sharing* the ideas of the

circle members, in order to assist in drawing up the problems so that these will be realistic and possible to tackle by the circle members.

Another example will be used as an illustration to the second phase. Let us assume that there is a group of workers who want to study the conditions of their community during the 1950's. Much can have occured during this period. Here are some suggestions indicating how this study circle could avoid drowning in a universe of events: It can study the formation of a trade union branch, those involved and the circumstances leading to the formation. It can compare working-life conditions at the beginning and at the end of that period. The conditions at an industrial plant can be put under the circle's magnifying-glass, or it can investigate housing issues of that period.

But before the study circle definitely decides on a problem area, it must make a preliminary investigation as regards the materials it will need for the studies. Should the sources be few or difficult to have access to, the circle will find it better to choose another problem. Otherwise, it may have to fight an uphill battle which could end finally in general disappointment.

The *third* phase will dwell on planning matters. How should the members locate relevant facts? By means of interviews, letters, registers, study visits, library studies etc? Who can they consult? To what extent should they inform local newspapers and other mass media of their research? Can the circle work be assisted by the general public? How should the information collected be recorded? What financial resources will be needed? And a very important aspect: How are the circle members to ascertain the credibility of the sources they are using? Where can the members find independent cross-references, because it is known that much material is often biased or confused?

Within this planning period the circle will also have to consider how the work should be distributed amongst its membership. It is dangerous, judging from experience, to rely heavily on only part of the members. The circle will also have to decide on how the observations and conclusions shall be compiled and presented: Shall the final presentation be made as an exhibition, as a meeting programme, as a play, as an article in a local newspaper etc?

Obviously, the planning phase is far from a one-meeting affair. It will have to be allowed to go on for some time. A good result presupposes good planning and good preparations.

The *fourth* phase comprises the gathering and compilation of information. This is the hunting period where the members go prying about to find the information they are looking for. This requires an open mind. The circle which, e.g., studies the past of an organization should not satisfy itself with press cuttings and minute-books presented to them but also ask for other matters, circulars, posters, members' registers, photos and names of those who have personal experience from the period studied. Generally,

the circle should be careful not to bring the actual materials to the circle but only the information properly noted together with detailed information of the source used. Should materials be brought to the circle, one should always consider the risk of loss and damage.

Detailed information is important. We all know that if a statement is not possible to check, its value will be greatly reduced, however true it may be!

It is important for the members to keep one another well informed of what they are doing. It is, namely, not unusual for a member to have come upon information which may be important for another member's work.

Two other processes must go parallel to this gathering of information. The facts gathered must be compiled in a meaningful way and analyzed as to their consequences for the research. Further, the preparations for the final presentation should start during this phase.

The *fifth* phase will consist of a careful checking of the compiled information, which should be put in a digestable form. It also means that possible footnotes and literature must be related to the planned presentation. This work gradually passes into the finishing work.

The *sixth* phase will give the final touches to the presentation by the study circle to be followed by delivery to the public, to the organization or to anyone else considered as the final receiver of the research result.

Whatever the form chosen, it will often be of great interest to know the work of the circle not only for those who took part in the venture but also for others. A good presentation should therefore in one way or another also tell the story of the research. Such a story can be important for other research circles as well as stimulating new groups to form their own research circles.

Finally, there will have to be *seventh* phase having two issues only: (a) an evaluation of the studies (How well did we succeed? Where did we meet with difficulties? What may have caused these? Which of our experiences can be valuable to other research circles? Etc.) and (b) a consideration for the future (What's next?).

Thus the members of a research circle should not only learn how to cooperate, how to carry out small scale research, how to critically assess information, how to inform about results achieved, but also enrich their knowledge of the area studied.

Work in study circles

The learning process

Basic to the philosophy of study circle learning is the view that all learning stems from a life-long interaction between the individuals and their environment. This concept of knowledge is thus extended from the traditional view of knowledge, consisting of understanding and the amount of information, towards being "the result of a dynamic process, with the help of which people try to explain, influence or change their circumstances" (from T. Stockfelt and M. Sköld, "Everyday learning – the basis for adult education". Brevskolan, Stockholm 1981. *P. 8*). Understood in this sense, knowledge is not mere facts acquired but also the ability to use these facts in order to understand and change life – a tool in the struggle for existence.

Using our experience we can describe how this everyday knowledge is acquired (it should be mentioned that the views below have been eloquently depicted by Torsten Eliasson in many contexts, for example in his "Vuxenpedagogik" – Sveriges Radio, Stockholm 1968 – the title of the Swedish original in English, "Adult education methodology"):

By *exercises and training* in working-life, in organizational and societal business, in leisure-time activities and in the family or whereever else we often deal with different issues,

by *immediate observations*, where we see, hear and experience matters which we interpret and remember,

by *solving problems* of a practical character, which we analyze and try to find different solutions to,

by *adapting* ourselves when we face new and different conditions, for example when we move and when we change jobs,

by *receiving and taking responsibilities*, in organizations and in society, at work, at home etc.,

by *unmethodical reading* of what we find interesting, that is our reading for pleasure (incl. novels and drama),

by *contact, conversation, exchange* with other people, often people we consider exemplary in one way or another,

by being exposed to *instructions in everyday situations* at work, at home and in organizations, and

by *organized group activities*, meetings and conferences, which do not concern education, but which in spite of this result in new knowledge, insight and a change of attitudes.

Actual learning in study situations does not differ significantly from everyday learning as described above. The main difference is to be found in the fact that we have entered the study situation in order to learn.

Basically, *learning is an active process*. Information will only contribute little to learning but, working with it, for example, by taking notes, assessing its importance and applying it to new situations, will definitely result in new knowledge. This learning can be further improved by using a learning *process where cooperative efforts aim at combining the individual resources* of those involved in the learning situation.

The studies will benefit from a methodical approach as outlined below:

- Sounding out of interests, experience – mapping
- Planning
- Information
- Working with the information
- Reporting the studies
- Evaluation

The adult learner and his prejudices

Besides possible fees and travelling to the site for the studies, the biggest obstacle for an adult entering learning circumstances seems to be himself or herself and their attitudes and prejudices. This obstacle is rooted in two misconceptions or beliefs:

Adult people can and know only little. Generally they grossly *underestimate* their everyday knowledge acquired by means of many years of practical experience, and *overestimate* formal school knowledge. Adults who only have a few years formal schooling often believe that they "know nothing" or that they "are dull".

Adult people are not able to learn, or believe themselves far inferior to youngsters. They may, for instance, have found the school work of their sons and daughters too difficult to understand.

The views expressed above correspond to common observations. Of course, people are more or less biased as regards their learning capability, depending on their different backgrounds and experiences. Some causes for the pessimistic views aired by adults are:

Formal education is held in a tremendously high esteem in modern society. Thus, those who have little formal education believe themselves to be inferior.

Many an adult has *negative memories from school.* The old school was not very good. They may have been badly treated, or thought that they did not manage the studies well enough.

The adults have been *absent from theoretical studies for a long period.* They may be out of practice, "rusty", unfamiliar with studies, their knowledge from school obsolete and to a large extent also forgotten or only partly remembered. They often have obvious gaps in their "formal" knowledge.

Aduits *do not have sufficient study technique.* Their approach to the materials used can be unsuitable. They may not know how to work with the information in an efficient manner.

Adults often have *"external" problems,* which may render the studies more difficult, such as a dull, monotonous job, shortage of time and little remaining physical capacity, and many claims which compete with the studies.

Experience and research have shown that the *development of the learning ability of men does not stop* during the late adolescence as was earlier believed. How intelligence is developed amongst adults, depends more on experience made than on age as such.

It is therefore quite natural for study circles to base their study work on training the members to attack problems together. By working towards solutions they develop and acquire knowledge.

But in order to achieve a positive study climate, circle meetings should stimulate the members and engage them in a way which is different from what they may have experienced during a long and often both physically and mentally tiring working-day. The active participation of all members is a must. This activity can, for example, be achieved by means of conversations and clear introductions of any and all information.

The members must also experience that they are together at the meeting, that they are part of a companionship. This can, among other things, be accomplished by creating a peaceful and relaxed atmosphere, and by a common awareness and acceptance among the members of the objectives of the circle and its working procedures.

They should work in a manner governed by a democratic spirit. Hence, everyone must have opportunities to have his/her say. Everyone must have equal influence and be treated as equals. Those who have less must be given extra support and encouragement.

Study circle procedures

The lack of ties with "formal education" sets the study circle in a favourable position as regards its adult participants. It is free from any dependence on formal syllabi and schoolmaster methods. But its freedom has its limits. Definitely, a study circle must be concerned with *studies performed in a process characterized by a democratic spirit*, where the studies are adapted to the circle members' circumstances and interests.

No limit can be set for how long a period a study circle can continue. The factors are, for example, the location of the circle meetings, where the members reside, their endurance, the financial requirements for the circle and other resources required, and – most important – whether the study circle studies satisfy the needs of the members of the circle.

A study circle can go on for as long as the members enjoy it and can attend the meetings. These must be planned and objectives /aims/targets/goals for the studies agreed upon. Means will have to be found to attain these objectives etc. Information sources and other necessary resources must be identified and arranged for. A time schedule should be produced indicating the steps towards the agreed objectives. A tentative agreement should be reached on how the study circle members should work and share the contributions to the proceedings of the meetings. Different social activities within the study circle framework should also be considered.

It is here that the differences between a study circle and any study group becomes evident. A study group can meet *only once*, for example, in order to look into a certain problem and propose a solution to it. A study circle, on the other hand, can never be a one-off session, but will have to go on for some time in order to secure the *continuity* which is so necessary for serious studies. Hence, a study circle should seldom meet less than four or five times.

Continuity from meeting to meeting in the matters studied is another necessity for the study circle, while the content of a series of study group meetings can be very different or even unrelated to one another. A comparison of the role of the study *group* leader with the role of the study *circle* leader often shows the former to be more of a chairperson and the latter more of a study organiser. However, in spite of this division, there are no clear-cut limits. One should expect numerous border cases. But these are not to be worried about too much. What matters, and what should be our main concern, is that the studies are pursued in an orderly way aiming at accomplishing what the circle members have agreed upon.

There is, as has been mentioned earlier (p. 38) an important demand for an *active* participation by all members. Of course, some members will be more active than others – and the reasons for this may be many – but we shall strive to encourage the reserved member at the same time as we try to calm down the over-

enthusiastic or very talkative member. We can be active in many ways, by taking part in the conversation, by working with the information available or by carrying out assignments and other tasks.

Work in study circles should try to relate to reality that which may seem theoretical or abstract by studying the implications of theory on real life, and conversely, the influence of real life on theory, to give *visibility* to the studies. Study visits to a sewage plant or direct observation of the effects of pollution in a river might be an excellent corroboration of theoretical studies of a circle looking at Man's environment.

In recognizing the members as individuals having common bonds, the study circle method strives to vary the meetings by trying to avoid dull and boring uniformity, that is, it considers *variety* to be an essential component of a meeting.

Finally, the studies should be related to what actually happens – in the community, in the world – and to the needs, interests, experiences and capabilities of the members. They should be *actual* as well as *topical*.

(This discussion and the following one are based on a classical, and to a large extent still valid handbook in adult education – the result of five years of collective work under the chairmanship of Torsten Husén of Stockholm University: Torsten Husén et al, "Vuxna lär – förutsättningar och metoder i vuxenundervisningen". Örebro 1958. The Swedish title of the original in English, "Adults learn – conditions and methods in adult education".)

A comparison

It should by now be obvious that study circle work has few if any similarities to traditional class teaching. Its approach is horizontal whereas traditional class teaching is vertical. Where the latter method tries to keep the teacher in a dominating role, the former encourages everyone to participate on equal conditions. The most manifest differences between a study circle and a class are shown here:

Study circles	**Classes**
Have leaders sitting among the group members as one of them. Equality is a main principle! You cannot see directly who the leader is.	Have teachers standing in higher positions than the students. The students may be equals among themselves but the teachers are superior. You can easily recognize the teacher.
Decide on the plan of studies themselves – accept, reject or amend. The members have supreme power.	Are generally presented with subjects and syllabus, which must be accepted. The teachers have more power than the students.

Study circles	Classes
Usually have 6–12 members.	Usually have more than 20 students.
The members are seated so that they can see one another, for instance, sitting in a circle.	Most often the students are seated in rows. They can easily see the teacher, but have difficulties in seeing their companions.
The members know or will come to know each other well.	The students' relationship will in many cases be very superficial and impersonal.
Most people participate, the opportunity to speak is evenly distributed.	Few students participate actively in the lessons. The teachers speak most of the time.
People work together (cooperate), the majority of them for mutual goals.	People work alone (or compete), the majority for individual achievement.
Are trying to solve problems and to look for solutions, thus increasing the self-reliance of the members and stimulating them towards an inquiring mind.	Are often expecting to be given solutions and told the "truth" by their teachers, thus increasing students' dependence on authority.

Sounding out interests, experience – mapping

Any study circle will have to start with its members: Who are we? Why have we joined the circle? What do we expect to attain by the circle studies? What are we interested in? What educational background do we have? Do we have any experiences which can be related to the studies? Are we interested in studying only or would we like to solve problems which concern us? What assets do we have and where do we think we have our weak spots?

Questions like those asked above can provide very valuable – and often crucial – information for the planning and performance of study circle work.

But a word of caution is on its place here. Some people do not want to be asked about their needs and interests while others do not mind volunteering personal information. Why not test the situation by starting with some neutral questions. For example, address, age, telephone number, preference for meeting days and hours, previous experience of the subject to be studied. Any possibly sensitive question should be put so that it is not directed at anybody in particular, or it might be used as some kind of discussion question for subgroups arranged by dividing the circle into two or three more groups.

Planning

The involvement of study circle participants in actual planning is very important. Being responsible in reality for the planning, they will also consider themselves responsible for the result of the studies. Thus, when planning is carried out as a joint activity, the members are likely to participate in the studies loyally and actively.

Planning should, however, not be looked upon as a one-off event but as an continous activity even if the main part should be made at the first meeting. Plans, for example, will have to be changed according to changing conditions. The next meeting will always have to be considered and outlined. Homework, individual assignments, inviting guest experts are matters which cannot often be decided on at the first planning meeting. Of course, matters like these can be delegated to the study circle leader, but then there is an obvious risk that the feeling of mutual responsibility amongst the members will be impaired. This responsibility is an asset which cannot be emphasized enough when study activities are based on democratic principles.

We can use planning for a course circle as an illustration. Although such a plan will have to consider what was studied earlier and what may come next, it should be strictly limited to the actual study season, as so much may happen between the seasons upsetting long term preparations. The plan of study should proceed from the previous knowledge and experience of the members in order to establish the starting level, from the objectives of the circle and from the number of meetings available. It will have to list literature to be used or indicate where information materials may be obtained. The plan should propose how a possible subject or area of studies might be divided on the meetings and suggest questions for discussion of problems to solve. It would be an advantage if the plan could consider procedures for use at the meetings and how the members and the study circle leader can share the job of moving the circle forward: Should each meeting have its own chairperson or should this task be given to the study circle leader? Should the members in turn review, for example, relevant textbook sections and record the meetings? Who will take care of social activities in connection with the meetings?

It is, however, quite common that study circles are presented with *readymade plans* for their studies. Such plans can have the form of correspondence courses adapted for study circles, textbooks supplemented with a plan of study, or textbooks especially composed for study circles. However tempting it may be to follow such plans slavishly, these should be looked upon as suggestions for the studies.

The study circle should always be free to adapt the presented plan to its particular circumstances – the weakness of centrally produced study material is, that these are based on a series of assumptions of what constitutes an average study circle having av-

erage people with the same average needs and interests, assumed by the producers of the study materials. Actual study circle members are, however, individuals with distinct individual needs and interests, which may, but need not coincide with the views of the central planners. Consequently, the first task of a study circle should be to scrutinize the readymade plan and its accompanying study materials in order to assess to what extent they can be used by the circle – to see what can be skipped, what requires to be amended with additional information, and what can be used as it is.

Should the plan of study contain questions for discussion or suggestions for actions, the circle should now and then consider to what extent these are relevant to the needs and interests of the members and to the objectives of the circle.

This means that the study circle will have to carry out a balancing act where the interests of the central planners on the one hand will have to be weighed against the interests of the circle members on the other hand. Usually the conflict will not concern the objectives and general outline of the studies but questions about where to put the emphasis.

The planning procedure will be quite different when the study circle is more or less left to produce its *own plan of study*. It may be advantageous to the circle from practical point of view to appoint a subgroup, with composing a draft plan of study as its task. Such a plan ought to show the objectives of the study circle and, if possible, describe them in a manner which makes it possible to see if these objectives are achieved. Needless to say, such objectives should be realistic and adjusted to the members. The group will bring the plan back to the circle at the same or subsequent meeting, where it must be thoroughly considered before any approval.

Although the proposed procedure might be time-consuming it has the advantage, that it is based on the members interests, experiences, capabilities and needs.

This kind of planning can be difficult when the study circle completely starts from scratch. But if it bases its planning on printed materials, such as textbooks, booklets, pamphlets and brochures, it should not be too difficult.

While planning may proceed from obtained printed materials, in reality it will not be possible to separate the planning from the issue of how the studies should be carried out – that is the principles of activity, continuity, visibility, variety, actuality and topicality in the study circle work. These should, either concealed or, best in the open influence the planning activities. The work will be more easily performed if all the different elements are brought into the deliberations.

A further, more detailed discussion of how to compose a plan of study can be found on p. 60 and subseq.

Information

Any learning is preceded by a provision of information and experience. Although these two concepts are related, their contents differ. For the sake of convenience, no difference at all will be made in the following. Where the word "information" is used in this section it may just as well be interpreted to mean "experience".

Some information can be facts, issues and problems presented by or to the circle members. It may consist of new perspectives or of ways of looking at facts, or may even take the form of solutions generated by the members' collective work. Whatever it is, the study circle members will have to be provided with information which they can work with and learn from.

The information can be provided in many ways. The circle members themselves may dig it up by making interviews, sifting archive materials, studying journals and newspapers, composing statistics and visiting places. A textbook can give the basic facts which supplemented by information from the members, will carry the studies to the objectives set by the circle. A guest lecturer or an invited expert may throw light on a book or topic studied so that essential issues emerge (there is an old saying that "we are unable to see the wood for the trees").

The information can also be introduced to the circle members, for example, by means of home assignments combined with a consequent conversation, perhaps about the consequences of the facts given in the assignments, or as considerations of which facts are most relevant to the members etc.

The members may, in turn, contribute to the information by introducing the topics of the meetings, individually or in teams. In the latter case they can perform an informal conversation or a dialogue. They can also divide the introduction into separate sections, where each one takes his/her part. Role play is often quite successfully used for member contributions.

I have played down the role of the study circle leaders, as I consider their tasks to be mainly of administrative nature. But this circumstance should not be a reason for them to withhold needed facts from the members – that would be unfair to them. And they are study circle members too!

The examples given in this section are few but quite common. They show that information can be provided and introduced in many forms. Which form should actually be used depends on the study circle members, the capability and experience of the study circle leader, the subject studied and the actual study circumstances.

Working with the information

When study circles work with the information provided this should result in an improvement of the members' understanding

of the issue studied, or of them approaching a solution to the problem they have undertaken. Conversation has been the most common form where the circle leader and the other members work jointly, seeking to grasp the meaning of sections studied or trying to solve the problems they have committed themselves to. It should be natural for them in their pursuance of the objectives set to cooperate and, hence, discourage discussion supporting individual or small group opinions. Instead of arguing they should concentrate on a factual exchange of views, thereby avoiding emotional and demagogic debates.

A successful conversation development presupposes a good start. Issues and problems studied will have to be carefully considered and clearly stated in order to reduce the possibilities of confusion entering the conversation. We will gain much if we allow each matter to be treated according to its merits. Nothing can be gained by a hasty performance. This very important task is usually with the study circle leader, but a wise leader shares the responsibility with the member introducing the issue to the meeting.

During the meeting we must establish what is common-ground and what additional information seems to be required for proceeding with the information or for solving the problems. This task belongs to all circle members.

The importance of active participation in the conversation has been stressed here. But there are other means of working with the information, for instance, by taking down notes, by reading and by structuring what has been read. Some of these tasks can be made individually but most of them will benefit from united efforts.

When the meeting approaches its closure – before any discussion about topics for the next meeting, about assignments or about possible changes of the plan of study etc – the circle should assess what has been achieved so far, recapitulate the different views aired, and note what remains to be looked into further, as observed from the deliberations, or caused by lack of informations, or lack of time. Such a summary should be conducted in an objective, balanced manner and, further, be clear enough to be recorded by the member serving as a secretary to the meeting.

But the work with the information given at the meeting should not stop with the closure. It should continue afterwards. This can be arranged by asking the members to think the matters over at home, for example, by comparing some of the conclusions arrived at with the study material used or with other sources. This informal working with the matters studied, contributes to an improved learning as well as maintaining and increasing interest in studies. The retention from the meeting can be further improved by having a member briefly summarize the experiences of the past meeting in a minute-book which is read to the members at the next meeting.

Reporting the studies

It is not uncommon for study circle members to undertake to look further into a problem or to dig up some additional information with the intention of throwing more light on a problem or topic studied. Not all consider themselves able to present written reports, so it is quite common that findings are presented orally. If more than one member is involved, they will, of course, have to report jointly, by each of them presenting a section, performing a dialogue, or with the form of an interview.

The members will in any case benefit from making simple, brief notes to base their oral presentation/report on. Such notes should be arranged in the order they are going to be used for the presentation. The presentation will be facilitated if the notes only contain major, essential facts (the bones only, and not the flesh), and if they are noted on a piece of paper using the space of the paper generously. If it is possible the give the notes a visible structure by using underlinings and by indexing it with figures or letters, so much the better. Any detail will thus have to depend on the memory of the members making the report. The risk of leaving out important details should be very slight as experience shows that it is generally only trivial matters or matters of relatively little importance which are left out.

Occasionally a member has been asked to present a solution to a problem but has found it to be above his/her ability. He/she cannot possibly solve it. Such is life. We are all surrounded by problems, the solutions to which we cannot find. The fact that the member has not solved the problem, does not make his work a failure. On the contrary, he may be able to pinpoint what prevented him from solving it. A report giving a list of the obstacles experienced and a possible strategy to tackle the problem, can be an extremely valuable result.

If anything is well done, it is often worth recording. That is often the case for study circle meetings. Although there are always some pains involved when recording a meeting, these pains may be greatly compensated for, when the members at the end of a series of circle meetings can look back using these minutes and say: "Did we really achieve all this?"

If it is agreed that the record is to be brief and only concern what the recorder believes to be essential matter, and if the recording task is rotated among/shared by the members, it should not be very difficult to arrange this recording.

It is, however, true that many people find it very difficult to write. And for some it is virtually impossible. Those who face such difficulties should never be forced to carry out recording duties but, whenever possible, be encouraged to improve on their writing, for example, by now and then being asked to make some very brief and simple notes for the study circle. And illiterate members should, of course, be stimulated to join literacy classes etc.

Some aspects on reporting are also discussed in the section about research circles (compare pp. 34–35).

Evaluation

The work of a study circle can always be improved and become more efficient by examining the objectives set. There exist a number of questionnaire forms for "measuring" progress in studies. But unless they are clearly related to the objectives of the individual study circle they may, unfortunately and easily, provide very biased or even false, information. A study circle can accomplish a much better measure if they simply ask themselves, discuss and record the answers to questions similar to the following:

- What did we intend to achieve with our participation in the study circle? To what extent did we succeed or fail? And in case of perceived problems: What may have caused the problems?
- Did we all enjoy the studies? Whatever the answer: Why?
- What can we improve? Materials, manner of working together?
- How did we regard the study materials used? Did they suit us? Did we have problems in using them? If so, what kind of problems?
- How did we relate to the study circle leader? What can be left as it is, what should be improved?
- To what extent can we use what we have learnt? Do we need additional knowledge? What?
- What do we think about the meeting arrangements: day, hour, length, place?

Study circles within organizations

Most study circles are integrated parts of popular movements. Since their inception, they have been used as a means of involving members in movement work. The philosophy behind this is simple: members who only exist as numbers in registers – passive or luke-warm members – do not maintain a popular movement, nor do they develop it. In fact, an organization where the members are only "numbers" is not a popular movement, as this must be based on people's active support.

Active support does not come out of the blue. Not only does it require a continous systematic interaction between the members and their trustees (leadership), it also calls for individual involvement in the work of the movement and individual responsibility for it. For this to be achieved, the membership must be educated in the ideas, history, structure and work of the movement as well as be provided with a general education making the studies of the movement easier (cf. p. 8).

Not only is the study circle the least expensive form of study. It also provides excellent learning opportunities at the same time as it supports an individual involvement in organizational work. In

his foreword to Carl R Hutchinson's "Teachers manual for study circles" (National Cooperative Union of India. New Delhi, 1966) Jerry Voorhis underlines this:

"If there are enough good strong Study Circles in any state or country, there will be good cooperatives there too. Because the Study Circles are the blocks out of which the cooperative building is built."

But study circles do not mushroom by themselves. They need support with materials, advice and occasional visits by those responsible for organizing the study circles. Their activities may have to be coordinated, particularly when it comes to campaigns and counselling business. Study circle leaders need to be trained and retrained. Visiting study recruiters (p. 52 and subseq.) must be selected and briefed.

These examples of matters requiring organizational efforts, can easily be extended. Likewise, we can find additional reasons for forming study circles within an organization. But those given above should be enough to show the mutual benefit the study circle and the organization have of each other.

Finding study circle members

Who can form a study circle?

The forming of a study circle is greatly facilitated if its membership is recruited from within an organization, such as a local union, a club or a cooperative society. This increases the likelihood of the members having similar backgrounds, shared interests, similar education etc.

Although forming a circle will be made much easier if it is supported morally and economically by an organization, individuals or groups of people can also take the initiative to start study circles without external support.

The individual participants themselves may desire to acquire increased knowledge and insight enabling them to solve problems they face, or they may simply just want to arrange for a meaningful leisure-time together with friends.

The initiators need, of course, to have some knowledge of what constitutes a study circle, enough to give a future member of a study circle a rough idea of the study method and the intended field of study activities. This may be the study of the bye-laws or constitution of a local union in order to find out its implications for union members, the history of early settlers in the community of the circle members, the impact of the flow of sewage in a river passing through the community, or how local government is organized etc.

Now, assuming that many possible study circle participants reside locally: how do we find them, how do we approach and recruit them?

How to find the participants

Generally speaking, our first recruitment actions should involve increasing the awereness of people, indicating that we will attemp to form study circles in any or some certain topics dependant, of course, upon local circumstances.

Our work will be made far easier if we restrict the possible participant population in one way or another. For example, it may be confined to a certain part of our community, to the members of a local branch of an organization, or to the employees of an industrial plant.

People living in the same area can be reached by means of letters,

by talks and other arrangements (e.g. exhibitions) at local meetings, by posters at shops and local offices and by advertisements. Local radio broadcasts can also be used. If we are not sure about which approach will serve us best, we would do well to avoid to put all our eggs in one basket: letters may never be read, people may not be able to come to meetings, their shopping and other business are not performed locally, they may forget to buy or read the local newspaper, and some never listen to local radio broadcasts.

We can also avoid some of these problems by restricting ourselves to people we know personally – neighbours, friends, colleagues and so on – and inform only them that we are to start study circles: "This is what we aim at. Are you interested to hear more about it?"

Members of a local branch are more easily found. We may use the branch's ordinary dispatch of circular letters to its members, the journal of the branch, or we may give informal talks at meetings, put up posters at places visible to all and distribute leaflets to those present asking them to circulate these further.

To contact *employees at an industrial plant* may, but not always, necessitate a slightly different approach. However, assuming that there will be no problems we can, for example, display posters on the union notice-board, in lunch rooms and at entrances; distribute leaflets at factory entrances and at union meetings; and mail letters to the employees. But addresses can be difficult to obtain, only a few turn up at meetings, bill-posting can be prohibited within the plant and made difficult at entrances. Confronted with difficulties – for example, the absence of a union, posters being destroyed when displayed etc. – we may consider to put more emphasis on distributing leaflets not only at entrances but also where employees commonly gather in the evenings. And why not ask the local newspaper to write an article about the planned activities.

This first step does not aim directly at recruiting people but at informing them that they will be asked to join a study circle. We intend to make people curious and, if possible, encouraged to talk about study circles with one another. Of course, anybody who wishes to volunteer for the studies at this first step, must be provided with further information, for instance, of where he or she can be registered.

The means suggested here for alerting future study circle participants are far from exhaustive and are not always the very best ones. In the end, it will be the task of those organising the studies to decide which means should be used. And there is considerable space for creativeness.

Here are some points which we could keep in mind when preparing information materials:

Posters should attract the attention of those they are intented for and really concern its potential readers. If our posters are de-

signed in such a way so that they are clearly distinguishable, so much the better. The text used must be clear and brief, so that it, if possible, can be read at a glance. At the bottom of the posters we could add: For further information, ask . . . (name of person to contact and where he can be found).

Leaflets share the characteristics of posters. They must be easy to read quickly before they eventually land in the waste-paper basket. Few points or remarks, entered in comic strip balloons under an attractive heading, supplemented by some pictures, will catch the eye of people far better than a wordy text dryly presented. Details are not needed: they should come at a later stage. But remember name etc of contact person.

Circular letters are best when brief and to the point. A quarter of a page should be enough – in fact, sometimes more than enough for the addressee. Should the study circle be run by an organization, the president or chairperson should be requested to sign the letter in order to render it sufficient weight.

Articles in member journals or in newspapers as well as *broadcasts* can generally be entrusted to editors and journalists – they are professionals. But we may gain from informing them during the preliminaries that we aim at alerting the public about what is to come.

Advertisements should adhere to the principles used for the posters. But it is doubtful whether we can afford advertisements which really will attract readers!

Exhibitions may sometimes be useful. We can expand on our posters and supplement these by pictures related to the considered study topics, literature to be used etc. Exhibitions are, however, better used at later stages.

Brief *informal talks* given at meetings should only aim at telling those present that they will be asked to join a study circle at a later stage. The talk should further contain a description of how the individual members will actually be approached. We can improve our presentation by asking one or two friends to volunteer questions. By this we will not only give some variety to the talk but also encourage other people present to venture with own questions.

How to recruit

With the potential study circle membership alerted and, wherever possible, duly informed about how it will be approached, the first step may again be used conveniently. However, this time it should be extended to give details about recruitment, possible topics, meeting places and hours, fees and, once more, contact people. But we have fooled ourselves about the prospects, if we are satisfied with these means only. Any response from future circle participants will, with the exception of the informal talk, entirely depend upon their own activity. It is not uncommon for people to be genuinely interested but simultaneously unable to

bring themselves to register for at study circle – sometimes because of forgetfulness, sometimes because of reasons outside their control.

We can gain a lot by supplementing these impersonal and indirect recruiting means by appointing Visiting Study Recruiters (VSR). These recruiters can work individually at working places and at meetings, but in teams of two in residential areas and at industrial plant entrances. Sometimes the recruiters will have to be equipped with special credentials. Whether the recruiter should carry out his visits during working hours or in leisure-time is often a matter of financial resources.

Ideally, there should be one man and one woman in each team. Their selection is, however, no easy matter. Experience has shown that the work of the VSR:s may meet with success only if they belong to the same social group as those they are recruiting from. The odds will be against them, should they be "strangers intruding from the outside". Hence, university educated people should not be sent to recruit workers with little formal education – they recruit better among their equals. Great care must be exercised when we select VSR:s.

The visiting recruiters, who can also be used as contact persons, should be on friendly terms with those they are visiting, or try to establish a good relationship. Preferably, they should know them personally in advance. This ideal circumstance seldom prevails, but the VSR should at least try to get to know who they are going to contact.

Bringing credentials and samples of study literature, if this be desired, the VSR begins by presenting himself and his credentials to the future participant of the study circle. Below are some points which can be used as guidelines translated to fit the "language" preferred in a hopefully ensuing conversation:

- It is generally better to present *an area for studies* instead of a complete "syllabus". Underline that the study circle itself decides on any plan for the studies. Supplement this description by producing books suggested for use. Inform about conversations from earlier visits – give the names of those contacted – and their preferences. Note any preference emerging from the conversation.
- Describe the study circle as a *pleasant study form*, where the members are learners but never pupils. They learn from one another, from their study material, from study visits, and from occasional visits by experts or more knowledgeable persons invited to the circle by the members. There are no connections to dreadful tests or exams.
- Underline that study circles have *little resemblance to classes* but much in common with social gatherings of friends and neighbours. Anybody is free to join a study circle. The study

circle method is well known as a study form for people with little formal education.

- Emphasize that circle studies basically aim at increased experience and improved *knowledge for use in everyday life*, be it at home, in unions or in other organizations, as a citizen or as a human being in a continously changing world.
- Explain explicitely that although the participants of study circles very often are called circle members, this does *not* mean that study circle meetings resemble the *formal meetings* of an organization – the major difference being that the circle aims at learning and social satisfaction while the formal one deals with the business of the organization and decision-making.
- Finally, give the time and place *of the first meeting*, mention possible fees and how payments can be made. Note possible preferences for meeting days, hours etc.

Towards the end of the recruiting tour the study recruiter should possess a list of names to be analyzed afterwards with regard to interest, preferences for topics and meeting days etc. Names obtained by other means should be added to this list.

In the end we may arrive at two lists of interested people: those who definitely declared their intention to join the study circle, and those who indicated an interest without committing themselves. The latter group is to be approached once more. They may have further questions to put to the study circle organizers. New alternatives to earlier suggested topics or meeting arrangements can be of crucial importance for their recruitment. And last but not least, their social relationship can make one combination of circle members agreeable but another impossible.

Finally, invitation letters should be sent to those recruited, indicating areas of studies, costs involved and how these should be met, where the first meeting will be held and the day and time for it. These letters should also give names of those responsible for the first meeting(s) and where they can be reached.

This section has to some extent dwelt upon the Visiting Study Recruiters. They are very important people, who make the study recruitment procedure far more efficient than the standard impersonal methods usually employed. But when these latter methods are combined with the Visiting Study Recruiter, they should be unbeatable.

The meetings

The first meeting

No set patterns exist for how the first meeting should be performed. Circumstances differ too much from circle to circle. Members may not know one another, or they may be old friends. They may be experienced in study circle work, or are about to make their first contact with a study circle. There may be other influencing circumstances, such as when circle organizers wish to assemble new study circles to a joint briefing.

This lack of a framework for the first meeting shall not, however, prevent three issues from being brought up: the introduction of the members to one another, the sounding out of relevant previous experience, knowledge and of preferences, and planning the studies.

The first meeting described here refers to a relatively inexperienced study circle, whose members have not met earlier in study contexts. Some issues or remarks may therefore seem unnecessary to experienced study circle leaders but they will have to put up with them, for som revision cannot cause any harm.

The work with the first meeting starts *weeks before*. The locations of the meeting must be secured, study material ordered or samples of books collected, invitation letters mailed, replies checked and a tentative plan prepared for the meeting. The preparations may also contain a superficial checking of the members' relevant interests, experiences and expectations.

There is no clear-cut answer to the question, who should actually carry out all these tasks. A study circle leader may have been appointed already, a study circle member may have offered his services, or an organization may wish to make the necessary arrangements.

For the sake of covenience, those responsible for preparing the first meeting will henceforth be called the study circle leader, or just simply the leader.

It goes without saying that the more thoroughly a meeting has been planned and the better the study circle leaders are prepared, the more easily they can adapt and change the meeting process according to the needs and wishes of the circle members and to other factors not known earlier.

It is vital for the study circle leader to turn up at the meeting on the *very day of the meeting*, well in advance of the circle members.

He should be there to see to it that the place is in order, that materials and equipment are available, to receive the members as they arrive, to introduce himself and to get them to feel comfortable.

When all have finally arrived, the steps outlined below may be useful to observe:

Introduction, where the members should come to know one another in a relaxed setting. In case some of them are new we can, for example, arrange the introduction by first asking the members to interview their neighbours, after which the roles of interviewer and interviewee are switched.

Sounding out interests, needs and expectations can become part of the introduction but care should, however, be exercised (cf. p. 41), when the leader tries to find out:

- which interests are related to the topic/subject/field of studies earlier agreed on,
- what the members want to learn, and for what purpose they intend to use their new knowledge, and
- what they expect from the meetings, from the work between the meetings and from the study circle leader.

The findings from this investigation/mapping can give good guidance for the planning and the use of the study materials and books introduced.

A survey of study material is a necessary step especially when the circle members have not met this material before. The members require a rough idea about the content in order to be able to decide upon *objectives*, working procedures, and *a plan for their studies*.

The leader should have prepared himself for a brief description of the study materials and how these are composed. The members may glance through the materials together with the leader at the same time as they try to pinpoint what may be the main aspects, using table of contents, illustrations, headings and possible summaries for their observations. This scrutiny may considerably help the leader to find how the members' interests are divided on the different sections of the study materials, what they find too exhaustive or too brief, and how the members' experience can be related to the material.

For a detailed discussion about objectives and planning, see pp. 42–43 and p. 60 and subseq.

Working procedures vary considerably, but the basis of work in study circles is the members' own activity, often expressed as a joint effort combined with individual inputs. However, before any individual tasks are introduced, we should have a conversation about study techniques employed by study circles. The starting point may be the members' attitudes towards home-work. A discussion may follow about what can be gained from home-work

tasks and about the difficulties we may meet when effecting them. Preferably, this should result in some simple hints for working at home.

The circle may make a group decision at this or at the subsequent meeting about to what extent the circle members should work individually between meetings. However, it may be wise to let this decision depend upon the members' experience of studies. A start at a slow pace is usually better than an attempt to go full steam ahead, possibly going beyond what the members can endure.

Working procedures contain, further, questions of breaks, smoking, refreshment and all the arrangements concerning the meetings (place, days and hours for the meetings), whether the meetings should be recorded or not, and if the office of the chair should rotate.

The next meeting should finally be brought into focus: What are we going to do next time we meet? What resolutions have we made about the next meeting and the time in between? Will we need any extra equipment? How should this be acquired, who will bring it?

Consecutive meetings

Even with a good start with a positive growth of the study circle members' social contacts, much will still remain before a study circle has been moulded into a group working well together. This process is comprised of the development of individual members from mainly being dependent on one another to becoming a united team. It is born out of joint work shared mutually by the members, who thereby successively receive new roles and functions. But not only this, they also come closer together and begin seeing one another in a different light than at the beginning. This development is, however, seldom smooth. The individual differences of members can be considerable: Different occupations, education, and environment contribute much. So do different basic attitudes, religious beliefs and temperaments. These differences can make the steps towards forming a team very tough. Think of all the problems which might occur, should we in one and the same circle have as members one of each of the following common characters: the dominating, the talkative, the shy, the querulous and the very deviating member!

With the preliminaries accomplished, which not exclude problems from cropping up at any time during this moulding process, the meetings will gradually pass into a steady development process. This can, for example, consist of the following study circle meeting components:

The follow-up of resolutions and commitments from preceding meetings in order to establish what was done and what was not realized. A basis for the work of the study circle, this particular

meeting should also try to find out how the members perceived their home-work etc: Was it difficult, interesting?

The revision of what was achieved at the previous meeting, which can just be the simple reading aloud of the minutes followed by a brief consideration of its content.

The planning of the meeting can contain questions such as these: Who should chair the meeting and who is to be responsible for recording it (should this not have been agreed on already)? How far shall we proceed today? Where shall we put the emphasis?

The information which cannot be separated from *working with the information*, will occupy the major part of the meeting. The study material, the experiences and observations of the study circle members, presented in one way or another, should be worked on so that the members can take stock of this information, look at it critically and retain what they consider important. This work can be realized by a conversation, by an actual training of skills, by producing questions, checking answers and statements, by evaluating facts and information, by making notes which demand an active listening, and by making summaries which may help the members to see what they have accomplished.

The evaluation of the meeting is essential for securing the members' influence on study circle work: How did we work today? How can we improve on it? Do we have any particular views on materials and methods used? What about the social arrangements? Shall we carry out more, or less, assignments between the meetings? Are we advancing according to our plan of study? Do we need to amend the plan?

The subsequent meeting has to be prepared. A brief summary of what was accomplished during the meeting can preferably work as an introduction. The preparations may be simple and can, for example, be arranged as a discussion about assignments for the next meeting; What shall the next meeting be devoted to? What should the members study, find out, prepare for this meeting?

Conversation at meetings

Conversation at study circle meetings is well worth some extra consideration. I have earlier stressed it to be desirous for all members to participate in the conversation of the study circle as a means to greater activity and, hence, better learning. But as Torsten Eliasson (cf. pp. 36, 37) has said, it cannot be an end in itself to have many or all active in a meeting. Of course, we greatly value the togetherness and the stimulant which can grow only when all participate actively. But the major reason for an active involvement, is the circumstance that everyone has something to give, that what everyone says, is something valuable, something to make good use of: 12 people who think hard, who express

themselves, and who participate actively, produce more of value than only 2 people acting in the same manner.

Based on their experiences, their creative or problem-solving capacities, these member contributions help the study circle to supplement, to analyze and to make an assessment of the materials it started from. When we make a note of what we have achieved, we indicate simultaneously the value of it and become aware that this is something for us to act upon when at home. Thus we contribute towards closing the gap between theory and reality.

But the contributions of the members will yield only little if we concern ourselves mainly with issues and questions, where the answers can only be "correct" or "wrong".

Questions, tasks and issues must therefore be related to reality. They must be dealing with people's experience, opinions, attitudes, ideas about their jobs or about their organizations. Sometimes the content of the answers are already known, or just the confirmation of something which we believed or expected. But new knowledge very often emerges, for example, indicating where the problems at a place of work can be found, or how some people have looked upon a certain issue. The knowledge may further be the presentation to a wider audience of a solution to a problem or a practical measure, hitherto realized only by a small group but unknown to the public at large. Or it may be a completely new concept, never before put into words.

With this in mind, we can help the conversation develop positively. This job can be made easier by a consideration of the following points:

Questions should be related to reality and allow for interests, attitudes and experience. Avoid using one-correct-answer-only questions and persuasive or ironical questions.

Introduce the *basis for the conversations* as well as any *problem* clearly and distinctly.

Encourage the members to bring forward their *experience* and *attitudes*.

Look at problems *critically* and *from every point of view*, consider similarly supplementary *facts provided*, *alternative* solutions as well as the practical *applicability* of different solutions.

Use *summaries* as a means to assess how far the work has proceeded, and what views have been brought forward so far. Try to always keep in mind the need for clarity.

See to it that as many as possible, if not everyone, are *actively* involved in the conversation and promote this to flow more among the members and less between the members and the "chair".

Even if these points are skilfully made use of, members can face difficulties. We can, however, make it easier for them:

- By proceeding in small steps, following a clear outline,
- by proceeding from the well-known to the unknown, and from what is simple to what is difficult,
- by working together,
- by striving to be clear and distinct, and
- by referring to the experiences of the members.

Planning in study circles

Objectives for whom?

Study circle members want to study. They may have been attracted by the free, voluntary and democratic nature of the study circle, which definitely gives them the capacity to decide for themselves on their studies: they have the privilege to decide on objectives, plan their studies, study material and many other matters. But an organization sponsoring study circles may wish to have its say, when it comes to the actual subject and the objectives of the circle. Common sense tells us that it would be ridiculous for, let us say, a cooperative organization to sponsor studies in matters which run contrary to the objectives of this organization. A trade union, for example, may influence the studies by encouraging studies in bargaining or company accounting and by waving aside any request to support studies in the history of art.

There are other ways in which an organization can have an effect on study circle objectives. For example, an organization producing study materials for sponsored circles will, indirectly or openly, describe the aims of the studies, when it decides on the content of the study material and the size of it.

However, what is prescribed, must not be slavishly attended to. Study circles have the prerogative to choose whatever they consider appropriate, to decide where they want to put the emphasize, and to supplement provided material with any other material they deem suitable. The circles should, however, be prepared to meet the costs of what they themselves have acquired from outside the organization.

The freedom of study circles also prevents organizations from censoring the studies – the circles may just simply leave the organization and continue on their own.

Unspeakable factors

The wishes, ambitions and capabilities of members of a study circle as well as familiarity with the subject for their studies, all play a part in the planning process. These parts can seldom be treated separately as they interfere with one another, sometimes openly, sometimes disguised or hidden – perhaps on a subconscious level.

Being taken for granted by people, these factors may not be

articulated at all. For example, a group of workers coming from the same place of work wants to form a study circle. They belong to the same local branch of a trade union. The conditions of work are similar to all of them. They know one another quite well. Their attitudes towards their job do not differ at all. The actual meaning of, for example, a single word used by them may contain a universe of experiences and feelings peculiar to them. There is no need for them to explain or define that word, because it is well known by them all. Examples of such words can be the following ones: safety, piece-work, shift-work, employer and lunch. When they are planning for their study circle, their conversation may therefore seem to resemble a series of incoherent events with an obscure meaning for an observer from "another parish". But the content of their conversation is, however, perfectly clear to the workers. This does not mean that all circle members understand one another, and that they plan well. Of course, real life shows planning to be far from perfect.

We may also conclude that anyone acting as a study circle leader must not only know but also understand the circle members. He should be able to listen, not only to what is said openly, but also to what is faintly hinted at. This is the basic reason for the common demand that circle leaders must be "parishioners".

Planning assets

"State the objectives, and half the job of the planning will be done". Statements similar to this are quite common, and come, in fact, very close to reality. Educators are well aware of the tremendous difficulties involved in the setting of objectives. Economy, conflicting attitudes (of, for example, planners, plan users and learners), time limitations, human resources and many others interfere with the setting of objectives.

These troubles are also found in study circles. But how can study circles be able to cope with planning when experts face such great difficulties? There is no simple answer to that question. Study circles have, however, two enormous assets compared to professional planners of education; All those involved belong to *the same "parish"* – they talk the same language. But not only this. They plan *for themselves* and not for strangers.

Study circle members are likely to respond with silence, when asked about the objectives of their studies. Although they may have difficulties in articulating what they aim at, they usually have a pretty good idea of what they want. A careful inquiry, beginning from questions about their reasons for joining the study circle, may finally reveal a complete consensus about what the study circle activities should result in.

If we do not want to make scientific investigations, experience has shown that we can satisfy ourselves with approximate objectives, as long as these are good enough to guide the circle success-

fully. But we may be helped by a consideration of the most common objectives, which can exist for study circles: (1) The objectives can describe skills and knowledge. (2) Based on an increased awareness among the members of their own capability, they can aim at liberating individual resources. (3) The acquisition of abilities to assess one's own and others' knowledge critically can be contained in the objectives as well as (4) the establishment or reinforcement of feelings of human dignity.

The objectives may also have manifest social elements, such as encouraging cooperation among people instead of furthering competition, the exchange of experiences, the working together for a mutually conceived goal, the provision of feelings of security and contact etc. Finally, objectives can aim at improving and developing the society in which the members live.

From objectives to a plan of studies

Even if we only aim at approximate objectives, it is necessary for us to proceed in some orderly way in order to see to it, that we cover what the members of the study circle – and their organization – wish to achieve. The process below shows *one* approach out of many possible, but one which is derived from study circle procedures. It is here assumed to be completed during one meeting, but it can be carried out just as well during several meetings or as an assignment given to individuals or a committee, instructed to work between the meetings.

It is quite common for study circles from the very beginning to assemble around a book, selected by themselves or proposed by an organization. The planning procedure for such circles does not differ much from the planning by study circles which, so to speak, start their work from scratch. I have chosen to describe the planning having in mind a study circle of the latter kind.

Let us assume that the circle has gathered to learn more about how a consumers' cooperative society should be organized and run. Although this should be the main reason why people have come, other reasons can be expected. The usual motive for acquiring knowledge about cooperatives because of an interest in forming a cooperative society, can, for example, be accompanied by an appreciation of opportunities to be together with friends, thus a social reason beside the cooperative one. And likewise, someone who became a member because his or her bests friends joined the circle, may have a latent interest in knowing more about cooperatives. Finally, motives which dominated at the beginning, can be replaced by new ones during the course of the circle.

Leaders of this kind of study circles will have to carry a heavier burden than those who can base their planning on a book selected in advance. By means of libraries, interviews with experts and correspondence with cooperative institutions, he must beforehand acquire a rough idea of what can be contained in the concept

"consumers' cooperative society". Books, brochures and leaflets about cooperatives, believed to be relevant to the members of the study circle should be gathered by him and brought to a planning meeting. The books etc. should not be too many as an abundance of them may cause confusion, but enough for the members to become additionally interested in the subject.

Here are some questions which may help him during his selection: Does the content fit the proposed studies? Is the approach of the book such as to appeal to the future study circle members? Must the reader possess certain previous knowledge? If so, what kind, and can it be compensated for in some way or other? Will the vocabulary and language used cause any problem to the members of the circle?

The study circle leader must also consider whether an expert should be invited to assist at the planning meeting. Should this be the case, the expert must be briefed about what may happen at the meeting and about the function of the expert – we may simply think of the leader as the expert in meetings, while the invited person is the expert in the subject. Usually, it is best for the expert to assume the passive role of a spectator, allowing the discussion to become a matter for the members of the circle. The contributions should be brief and mainly consist of answers to questions raised by the members, or questions put in order to clarify one point or another.

When and where an expert should be called upon to assist the members of the circle, will depend upon circumstances during the meeting. Sometimes a few minutes should be given for a briefing, sometimes it may suffice to enter the conversation when called upon.

An assessment of the actual situation can preferably become the starting point for the entire planning process: "Here we are. Let us talk about why we have come together, what we know about cooperatives, what relevant experiences we may have, and what other issues we think should be brought up for a consideration."

The members should feel free to chat for some time – maybe 20–25 minutes. Such a seemingly nondirected talk can sometimes yield an early answer (compare with the "brain-storm" process) to the question of what the objectives of the study circle should be. In any case, it will form a sound basis for a future conversation about the objectives. It is important for the study circle leader to record any agreement or consensus opinion and let this be accompanied by an analyzing conversation with the members about the preferences and knowledge of the group.

The members of the circle will also have to make some kind of a survey of available materials at an early stage. They should, whenever feasible, take a look at the materials already before the meeting – this will prepare them better for the ensuing conversation about what the circle should aim at. The members can per-

form this survey by turning the pages of the books etc, glancing at texts, pictures, headings, tables of content and summaries. This random examination serves two purposes: (1) to acquaint the members with different kinds of printed material available, their design, vocabulary and degree of difficulty; and (2) to provoke a conversation about the subject to be studied by stimulating thought and questions.

Following this survey the study circle leader should guide a conversation about the subject, which should aim at revealing what the members basically want the studies to result in. This is a delicat process, the dynamics of which can easily be thrown out of balance, should the leader attempt to follow any rigid, stereotype pattern. He or she must listen carefully all through the talk to what is said and to the undertones of the conversation as well as to what the members avoid bringing into discussion. The study circle leader will thus pay more attention to the process, its direction and general framework than to any previous listing of precise steps to be taken. They should not be afraid of allowing the initial conversation to wander about quite unrestrictedly, but little by little, listening to the views brought forward, they should try to narrow the conversation to focus on key matters. Two indicators can assist in establishing this point: (1) the conversation tends to be repetitive, that is, few if any new ideas come forward; and (2) periods of dullness and silence tend to be obvious. Perhaps something can be said like: "Listen friends. It now seems that we have covered the most important aspects of the subject. Why not now consider what we have said, so that we can take it down for our records. I have understood your principal views to be . . ." Here the study circle leader should present a summary of the conversation so far and check with the members that they have been correctly understood. As soon as the circle has arrived at an agreement about the summary, the leader should try to move on to the next matter, be it a break for coffee or fresh air, or a new topic to look into.

The members have earlier briefly talked about what they know of the subject matter and touched upon their experiences. Now the time has come for the study circle leader to introduce different possible areas for their studies, for example, by asking: "What do you think of this topic (these topics)? Is it (are they) attractive, interesting, challenging enough for us to work with? What topics/subjects would we prefer to study?" And a little later in the conversation: "Shall we try to order the topics mentioned according to our preferences, to make it possible to establish, what we all can agree on, what we regared as interesting, and what we may have to abandon?" These questions aim at helping the leader to see if the topics etc can be put into some logical order, if some topics must be studied ahead of others, and if some additional topics/subjects must be brought into the picture.

The members still have some distance to cover before they

have reached a description of what the studies should aim at. But they should, by now, have a vague idea of what they want to achieve, although further clarification may be required.

Given this list of topics, the study circle leader will now, for the first time, ask the members, if they believe it possible to cover the listed topics in a way which seems meaningful to them, considering the number of meetings earlier agreed on. Such a discussion will inevitable come to deal with the experiences of the members and to what extent they believe that they can contribute to the circle work. The circle will also consider books and pamphlets as well as any additional information that will have to be provided. This discussion should end with suggestions on how the different topics etc. should be divided at the meetings.

It would be proper for the study circle leader to let his/her summary of the achievements of the circle so far, be followed by a question similar to this one: "Now, having divided the different topics at the meetings, we can move to this question: Will this division of the topics make it possible for us to learn what we want? In other words, will the time given to each topic be enough, considering who we are and what we know? Let us talk about this, topic by topic, to see whether the time alotted is sufficient or not, and what steps we shall take, in case we need more or less time (increasing or reducing the time for other topics, excluding them or entering new ones, increasing or reducing the number of meetings etc)?

This discussion should come to reveal more about the specific learning needs of the circle members. Once such needs are identified, they must be carefully recorded by the study circle leader, discussed by the members and presented at the end of the meeting as a summary of what the study circle has accomplished during its first business meeting. The priorities made, the topics allocated at the meetings and the identified learning needs will together form what the study circle aims at, its objectives, however, crude their form may be.

It is, of course, important for the study circle to try to reach a consensus decision on its objectives. It would, however, be a mistake to make this the last decision on objectives taken by the circle. Errors may have occured because of misunderstandings, ignorance, inadequate study material and misjudgements. That is why objectives should be regularly reconsidered against the background of new facts and of experiences made. In fact, the study circle should at the end of each and every meeting ask itself: Are we progressing as planned? Does the plan fit the actual situation? There should thus be a continuous testing of the agreed objectives against achieved results.

The step from setting the objectives towards making a plan can be very brief for a study circle – it may even be difficult or even impossible to separate planning from the setting of objectives. The identification of learning needs, the selection of topics and

their distribution at meetings belong to planning. It only remains for the study circle described above to compile a proper list of its literature, make and note the division of tasks among the members, and list suggestions for study visits, before it has accomplished its study plan.

The study circle leader

Just as members join study circles of their own free will, the study circle leaders voluntarily undertake to guide the circles. Although they are usually nominated by the organization responsible for the studies, the right to accept or reject the nominated leaders always rests with the study circle members. Nothing can, however, prevent the members from electing their own leaders from amongst the membership of the circle.

This voluntary character of the leadership comes very close to the one of office-holders in organizations, such as trade unions, cooperatives. associations and clubs – the leaders are no more employees than the office-holders. They may, of course, be entitled to receive some kind of remuneration for expenditure expected during the course of the circle studies.

There are exceptions, but the best study circle leaders are generally those who possess the same characteristics as the circle members themselves. They should only have a greater ability than the other members to organize and express the views of the members. Leaders who deviate away from those they should lead and guide, often meet with very little success, unless they belong to the very few, who are considered charismatic leaders. It should be observed further, that as training alone does not make good leadership, neither does a natural talent make a capable study circle leader. But training in the study circle method as well as in administrative matters related to the work must be an integrated part of the activities of an organization which uses study circles for its member education. The reasons for this are manifest: Lack of knowledge of what a study circle is, can cause a complete fiasco, and ignorance about what ways and means a study circle leader can use for the administration of the work of a study circle, can cause loss of liking for the leadership.

The study circle leader and the teacher

The leader of the study circle carries the main responsibility for the method used and its application. The same might be possible to say about a teacher. But the approaches used differ considerable as can be seen from the following comparison:

The study circle leader	The teacher
Is one of the members constituting the group, the study circle, and approved by the circle members themselves.	Is imposed from outside the group, the class, and always appointed by an authority, for example, a school board.
Is guiding a group of people who have joined on their own free will.	Is – in majority of cases – teaching pupils who attend by law or by other involuntary means.
Works according to agreements with the members of the study circle.	Works according to instructions provided by the authorities.
Assists the study circle to work according to the plan the members have agreed on.	Follows the curriculum and tries to attain the standard prescribed by the authorities.
Can never act in an authoritarian manner.	Often uses authoritarian methods.
Shall try to create a social climate promoting a relaxed feeling of togetherness in the circle work.	Has to instil order and discipline in the class.
Should encourage cooperation among the members and stifle competition.	Generally favours competition and often regards cooperation as cheating.
Is a resource person when it comes to organize the studies but seldom an expert in the subject/topic.	Is a resource person, who conveys the "truth" and provides such information as he/she or the authorities consider proper.

The list above can be further amended. It should, however, be obvious that the main task of the study circle leader is to organize the work of the circle according to decisions made by its members. The teachers, on the other hand, are not only administrators of decisions made by the authorities but also given the power to decide in all other matters because of their presumed knowledge and status.

Main functions of study circle leaders

Two main functions can be identified for study circle leaders: To see to it that studies progress as agreed; and to promote a positive social climate at the meetings.

The *first* function, the organizational one, implies that the leader is willing to set aside quite a lot of time to circle duties. This shall not, however, be taken to mean that the study circle leader must do everything. The study circle works, by definition, collectively and the members have a mutual responsibility for the progress of the circle work. The organizational role of the leader falls in between the roles of a chairperson/president and a secretary. Here are some points to observe:

- To prepare a draft plan for the studies to be considered by the study circle, presented together with a suggestion for study materials and their use.
- To prepare estimates for possible expenditure for the study circle and how such costs might be met.
- To keep a list of the members together with notes on how they can be called to the meetings.
- To arrange time and place for the meetings and prepare a meeting calendar.
- To turn up in good time to check upon the arrangements for the meetings.
- To call the members to the meetings and try to ensure that he can be reached in case members should be unable to attend.
- To keep a simple attendence register, should the attendance not be contained in the minutes of the meetings, and a notebook where he can enter time and place for meetings, matters to be attended to, a schedule for a division of contributions to the meetings and other assignments.
- To arrange for the purchase/provision of study material and their distribution.
- To suggest how all circle members can contribute actively to the meetings, for example by making summaries of or comments on sections studied, or by reporting on enquiries made, or by briefly recording circle meetings in a simple minute form etc.
- To keep the members well informed of matters concerning the study circle and its work.
- If it has been agreed to call upon an expert, to make the necessary arrangements with him/her and inform of, for example, the studies performed, the members and their background, what the study circle expects from him/her, when and where he/she is expected to come . . .

The duties of the study circle leader may be facilitated, if a suitable report form is provided. Such a form should at least allow the particular circle to be identified and the members and their attendance to be registered. Many other matters might be required in individual cases. A design for a study circle report form,

giving the above facts and some other information, which often may be requested, can be found on pages 71 and 72.

The *second* function, the social and emotional one, is crucial to a positive development of the circle work. A failure by the study circle leader in this function, will likely result in the loss of members, unless very strong ties keep them together. But by trying to apply the following advice, leadership may be improved.

- Try to be a good listener, that is, listen to what the study circle members want to say or try to say before any comments are made.
- Learn who the members are, what they want, what they like or dislike etc.
- Try always to express the feelings and opinions of the circle – use "we" instead of "I".
- Promote cooperation and joint efforts.
- Encourage circle members to take initiatives, but do not wait for an initiative for so long a period that this becomes annoying to all.
- Encourage any contribution by shy or timid members, or still better, see to it that the encouragement comes from the entire study circle.
- Do not decide on behalf of the study circle without an explicit authorization to do so, that is, always keep in mind that the supreme authority rests with the circle members themselves.
- Meet the confidence of the members by attempting to keep promises and agreements.
- Should it be necessary to contradict/criticize someone, try to allow that person to change his/her position or to accept the criticism gracefully.
- Always try to consider the subject studied to be relevant and meaningful, to be something to talk about with enthusiasm.

STUDY CIRCLE REPORT

Study Organizer	First meeting year month day	Issued by	Circle number
Subject	Member fees	Report received	Invit. date
Organization/Place	Meeting site	Day of week	Hr

Study materials	Given out	Returns	Balance

Circle leader	Name, address and telephone number	Male	Female	Under 15 years	Shift work	Mat. given out	Date		
							—	—	—
2									
3									
4									
5									
6									
7									
8									
9									
10									
11									
12									
13									
14									

	1	2	3
Number of study hours at each meeting			
Number of members, incl. the leader, at each meeting			

Attendance: | Absence: –

	Name	Date																																	
		–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
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	11																																		
	12																																		
	13																																		
	14																																		
	Study hours																																		
	Members/ meeting																																		
		4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35		

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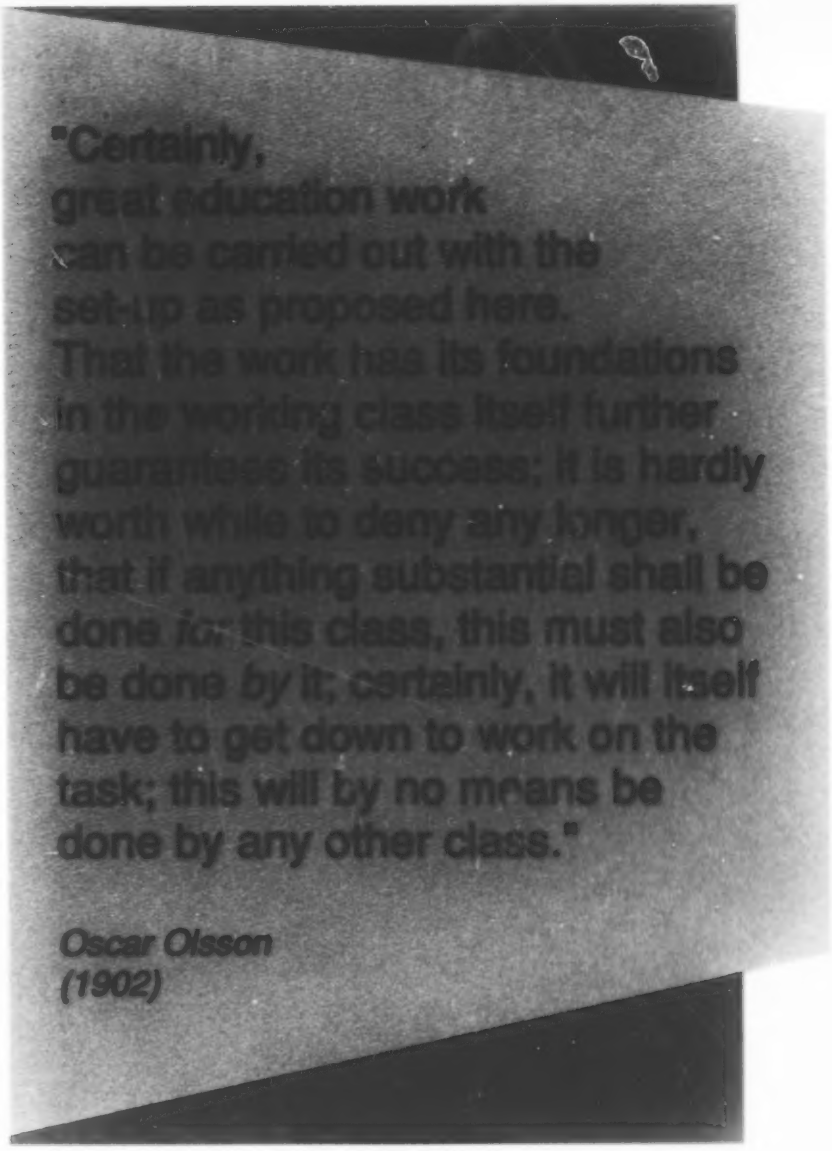
Place and date

Signature


"Certainly,
great education work
can be carried out with the
set-up as proposed here.
That the work has its foundations
in the working class itself further
guarantees its success; it is hardly
worth while to deny any longer,
that if anything substantial shall be
done *for* this class, this must also
be done *by* it; certainly, it will itself
have to get down to work on the
task; this will by no means be
done by any other class."
Oscar Olsson
(1902)

ABF

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